RUTH FIELDING AT COLLEGE

ALICE B. EMERSON

Louise Werner

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Ruth Fielding At College

OR

THE MISSING EXAMINATION PAPERS

BY

ALICE B. EMERSON

AUTHOR OF "RUTH FIELDING OF THE RED MILL," "RUTH FIELDING ON CLIFF ISLAND," ETC.

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BY ALICE B. EMERSON

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RUTH FIELDING AT COLLEGE
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RUTH FIELDING AT COLLEGE

CHAPTER I

LOOKING COLLEGEWARD

"Oh, my back! and oh, my bones!"

By no possibility could Aunt Alvirah Boggs have risen from her low rocking chair in the Red Mill kitchen without murmuring this complaint.

She was a little, hoop-backed woman, with crippled limbs; but she possessed a countenance that was very much alive, nut-brown and innumerably wrinkled though it was.

She had been Mr. Jabez Potter's housekeeper at the Red Mill for more than fifteen years, and if anybody knew the "moods and tenses" of the miserly miller, it must have been Aunt Alvirah. She even professed to know the miller's feelings toward his grand-niece, Ruth Fielding, better than Ruth knew them herself.

The little old woman was expecting the return of Ruth now, and she went to the porch to see if she could spy her down the road, and thus be warned in time to set the tea to draw. Ruth and

her friends, who had gone for a tramp in the September woods, would come in ravenous for tea and cakes and bread-and-butter sandwiches.

Aunt Alvirah looked out upon a very beautiful autumn landscape when she opened the farmhouse door. The valley of the Lumano was attractive at all times—in storm or sunshine. Now it was a riot of color, from the deep crimson of the sumac to the pale amber of certain maple leaves which fell in showers whenever the wanton breeze shook the boughs.

"Here they come!" murmured Aunt Alvirah. "Here's my pretty!"

She identified the trio striding up the roadway, distant as they were. Ruth, her cheeks rosy, her hair flying, came on ahead, while the black-haired and black-eyed twins, Helen and Tom Cameron, walked hand-in-hand behind her. This was their final outing together in the vicinity of the Red Mill for many months. Helen and Tom were always very close companions, and although they had already been separated during school terms, Tom had run over from Seven Oaks to see his sister at Briarwood for almost every week-end.

"No more of 'sich doin's' now, old man," Helen said to him, smiling rather tremulously. "And even when you get to Harvard next year, you will not be allowed often at Ardmore. They say there is a sign 'No Boys Allowed' stuck up beside every

'Keep Off the Grass' sign on the Ardmore lawns."

"Nonsense!" laughed Tom.

"Oh, I only repeat what I've been told."

"Well, Sis, you won't be entirely alone," Tom said kindly. "Ruth will be with you. You and she will have your usual good times."

"Of course. But *you'll* be awfully lonely, Tommy."

"True enough," agreed Tom.

Then Ruth's gay voice hailed them from the porch upon which she had mounted yards ahead of them.

"Come on, slow-pokes. Aunt Alvirah has put on the tea. I smell it!"

Ruth Fielding did not possess her chum's measure of beauty. Helen was a dainty, compelling brunette with flashing eyes—eyes she had already learned to use to the undoing of what Ruth called "the youthful male of the species."

As for Ruth herself, she considered boys no mystery. She was fond of Tom, for he was the first friend she had made in that long-ago time when she arrived, a little girl and a stranger, at the Red Mill. Other boys did not interest Ruth in the least.

Without Helen's beauty, she was, nevertheless, a decidedly attractive girl. Her figure was well rounded, her eyes shone, her hair was just wavy enough to be pretty, and she was very, very much

alive. If Ruth Fielding took an interest in anything that thing, Tom declared, "went with a bang!"

She was positive, energetic, and usually finished anything that she began. She had already done some things that few girls of her age could have accomplished.

The trio of friends trooped into Aunt Alvirah's clean and shining kitchen.

"Dear me! dear me!" murmured the little old woman, "I sha'n't have the pleasure of your company for long. I'll miss my pretty," and she smiled fondly at Ruth.

"That's the only drawback about coming home from school," grumbled Tom, looking really forlorn, even with his mouth full of Aunt Alvirah's pound cake.

"What's the drawback?" demanded his twin.

"Going away again. Just think! We sha'n't see each other for so long."

He was staring at Ruth, and Helen, with a roguish twinkle in her eye, passed him her pocket-handkerchief—a wee and useless bit of lace—saying:

"Weep, if you must, Tommy; but get it over with. Ruth and I are not gnashing *our* teeth about going away. Just to think! ARDMORE!"

Nothing but capital letters would fully express

the delight she put into the name of the college she and Ruth were to attend.

"Huh!" grunted Tom.

Aunt Alvirah said: "It wouldn't matter, deary, if you was both goin' off to be Queens of Sheby; it's the goin' away that hurts."

Ruth had her arms about the little old woman and her own voice was caressing if not lachrymose.

"Don't take it so to heart, Aunt Alvirah. We shall not forget you. You shall send us a box of goodies once in a while as you always do; and I will write to you and to Uncle Jabez. Keep up your heart, dear."

"Easy said, my pretty," sighed the old woman. "Not so easy follered out. An' Jabe Potter is dreadful tryin' when you ain't here."

"Poor Uncle Jabez," murmured Ruth.

"Poor Aunt Alvirah, you'd better say!" exclaimed Helen, sharply, for she had not the patience with the miserly miller that his niece possessed.

At the moment the back door was pushed open. Helen jumped. She feared that Uncle Jabez had overheard her criticism.

But it was only Ben, the hired man, who thrust his face bashfully around the edge of the door. The young people hailed him gaily, and Ruth offered him a piece of cake.

"Thank'e, Miss Ruth," Ben said. "I can't come in. Jest came to the shed for the oars."

"Is uncle going across the river in the punt?" asked Ruth.

"No, Miss Ruth. There's a boat adrift on the river."

"What kind of boat?" asked Tom, jumping up. "What d'you mean?"

"She's gone adrift, Mr. Tom," said Ben. "Looks like she come from one o' them camps upstream."

"Oh! let's go and see!" cried Helen, likewise eager for something new.

Neither of the Cameron twins ever remained in one position or were interested solely in one thing for long.

The young folk trooped out after Ben through the long, covered passage to the rear door of the Red Mill. The water-wheel was turning and the jar of the stones set every beam and plank in the structure to trembling. The air was a haze of fine white particles. Uncle Jabez came forward, as dusty and crusty an old miller as one might ever expect to see.

He was a tall, crabbed looking man, the dust of the mill seemingly so ground into the lines of his face that it was grey all over and one wondered if it could ever be washed clean again. He only nodded to his niece and her friends, seizing

the oars Ben had brought with the observation:

"Go 'tend to Gil Martin, Ben. He's waitin' for his flour. Where ye been all this time? That boat'll drift by."

Ben knew better than to reply as he hastened to the shipping door where Mr. Martin waited with his wagon for the sacks of flour. The miller went to the platform on the riverside, Ruth and her friends following him.

"I see it!" cried Tom. "Can't be anybody in it for it's sailing broadside."

Uncle Jabez put the oars in the punt and began to untie the painter.

"All the more reason we should get it," he said drily. "Salvage, ye know."

"You mustn't go alone, Uncle Jabez," Ruth said mildly.

"Huh! why not?" snarled the old miller.

"Something might happen. If Ben can't go, I will take an oar."

He knew she was quite capable of handling the punt, even in the rapids. so he merely growled his acquiescence. At that moment Ruth discovered something.

"Why! the boat isn't empty!" she cried.

"You're right, Ruth! I see something in it," said Tom.

Uncle Jabez straightened up, holding the painter doubtfully.

"Aw, well," he grunted. "If there's somebody in it——"

He saw no reason for going after the drifting boat if it were manned. He could not claim the boat or claim salvage for it under such circumstances.

But the strange boat was drifting toward the rapids of the Lumano that began just below the mill. In the present state of the river this "white water," as lumbermen call it, was dangerous.

"Why, how foolish!" Helen cried. "Whoever is in that boat is lying in the bottom of it."

"And drifting right toward the middle of the river!" added her twin.

"Hurry up, Uncle Jabez!" urged Ruth. "We must go out there."

"What fur, I'd like to know?" demanded the miller sharply. "We ain't hired ter go out an' wake up every reckless fule that goes driftin' by."

"Of course not. But maybe he's not asleep," Ruth said quickly. "Maybe he's hurt. Maybe he has fainted. Why, a dozen things might have happened!"

"An' a dozen things might *not* have happened," said old Jabez Potter, coolly retying the painter.

"Uncle! we mustn't do that!" cried his niece. "We must go out in the punt and make sure all is right with that boat."

"Who says so?" demanded the miller.

"Of course we must. I'll go with you. Come, do! There is somebody in danger."

Ruth Fielding, as she spoke, leaped into the punt. Tom would have been glad to go with her, but she had motioned him back before he could speak. She was ashamed to have the miller so display the mean side of his nature before her friends.

Grumblingly he climbed into the heavy boat after her. Tom cast off and Ruth pushed the boat's nose upstream, then settled herself to one of the oars while Uncle Jabez took the other.

"Huh! they ain't anything in it for us," grumbled Mr. Potter as the punt slanted toward mid-stream.

CHAPTER II

MAGGIE

RUTH FIELDING knew very well the treacherous current of the Lumano. She saw that the drifting boat with its single occupant was very near to the point where the fierce pull of the mid-stream current would seize it.

So she rowed her best and having the stroke oar, Uncle Jabez was obliged to pull *his* best to keep up with her.

"Huh!" he snorted, "it ain't so pertic'lar, is it, Niece Ruth? That feller——"

She made no reply, but in a few minutes they were near enough to the drifting boat for Ruth to glance over her shoulder and see into it. At once she uttered a little cry of pity.

"What now?" gruffly demanded Uncle Jabez.

"Oh, Uncle! It's a girl!" Ruth gasped.

"A gal! *Another gal?*" exclaimed the old miller. "I swanny! The Red Mill is allus littered up with gals when you're to hum."

This was a favorite complaint of his; but he pulled more vigorously, nevertheless, and the punt was quickly beside the drifting boat.

A girl in very commonplace garments—although she was not at all a commonplace looking girl—lay in the bottom of the boat. Her eyes were closed and she was very pale.

"She's fainted," Ruth whispered.

"Who in 'tarnation let a gal like that go out in a boat alone, and without airy oar?" demanded Uncle Jabez, crossly. "Here! hold steady. I'll take that painter and 'tach it to the boat. We'll tow her in. But lemme tell ye," added Uncle Jabez, decidedly, "somebody's got ter pay me fur my time, or else they don't git the boat back. She seems to be all right."

"Why, she isn't conscious!" cried Ruth.

"Huh!" grunted Uncle Jabez, "I mean the boat, not the gal."

Ruth always suspected that Uncle Jabez Potter made a pretense of being really worse than he was. When a little girl she had been almost afraid of her cross-grained relative—the only relative she had in the world.

But there were times when the ugly crust of the old man's character was rubbed off and his niece believed she saw the true gold beneath. She was frequently afraid that others would hear and not understand him. Now that she was financially independent of Uncle Jabez Ruth was not so sensitive for herself.

They towed the boat back to the mill landing.

Tom and Ben carried the strange girl, still unconscious into the Red Mill farmhouse, and bustling little Aunt Alvirah had her put at once to bed.

"Shall I hustle right over to Cheslow for the doctor?" Tom asked.

"Who's goin' to pay him?" growled Uncle Jabez, who heard this.

"Don't let that worry you, Mr. Potter," said the youth, his black eyes flashing. "If I hire a doctor I always pay him."

"It's a good thing to have that repertation," Uncle Jabez said drily. "One should pay the debts he contracts."

But Aunt Alvirah scoffed at the need of a doctor.

"The gal's only fainted. Scare't, it's likely, findin' herself adrift in that boat. You needn't trouble yourself about it, Jabez."

Thus reassured the miller went back to examine the boat. Although it was somewhat marred, it was not damaged, and Uncle Jabez was satisfied that if nobody claimed the boat he would be amply repaid for his trouble.

Naturally, the two girls fluttered about the stranger a good deal when Aunt Alvirah had brought her out of her faint. Ruth was particularly attracted by "Maggie" as the stranger announced her name to be.

"I was working at one of those summer-folks' camps up the river. Mr. Bender's, it was," she explained to Ruth, later. "But all the folks went last night, and this morning I was going across the river with my bag—oh, did you find my bag, Miss?"

"Surely," Ruth laughed. "It is here, beside your bed."

"Oh, thank you," said the girl. "Mr. Bender paid me last night. One of the men was to take me across the river, and I sat down and waited, and nobody came, and by and by I fell into a nap and when I woke up I was out in the river, all alone. My! I was frightened."

"Then you have no reason for going back to the camp?" asked Ruth, thoughtfully.

"No—Miss. I'm through up there for the season. I'll look for another situation—I—I mean job," she added stammeringly.

"We will telephone up the river and tell them you are all right," Ruth said.

"Oh, thank you—Miss."

Ruth asked her several other questions, and although Maggie was reserved, her answers were satisfactory.

"But what's goin' to become of the gal?" Uncle Jabez asked that evening after supper, when he and his niece were in the farmhouse kitchen alone.

Aunt Alvirah had carried tea and toast in to the patient and was sitting by her.

The girl of the Red Mill thought Maggie did not seem like the usual "hired help" whom she had seen. She seemed much more refined than one might expect a girl to be of the class to which she claimed to belong.

Ruth looked across the table at her cross-grained old relative and made no direct reply to his question. She was very sure that, after all, he would be kind to the strange girl if Maggie actually needed to be helped. But Ruth had an idea that Maggie was quite capable of helping herself.

"Uncle Jabez," the girl of the Red Mill said to the old man, softly, "do you know something?"

"Huh?" grunted Uncle Jabez. "I know a hull lot more than you young sprigs gimme credit for knowin'."

"Oh! I didn't mean it that way," and Ruth laughed cheerily at him. "I mean that I have discovered something, and I wondered if you had discovered the same thing?"

"Out with it, Niece Ruth," he ordered, eyeing her curiously. "I'll tell ye if it's anything I already know."

"Well, Aunt Alvirah is growing old."

"Ye don't say!" snapped the miller. "And who ain't, I'd like to know?"

"Her rheumatism is much worse, and it will soon be winter."

"Say! what air ye tryin' to do?" he demanded. "Tellin' me these here puffictly obvious things! Of course she's gittin' older; and of course her rheumatiz is bound to grow wuss. Doctors ain't never yet found nothin' to cure rheumatiz. And winter us'ally follers fall—even in this here tarnation climate."

"Well, but the combination is going to be very bad for Aunt Alvirah," Ruth said gently, determined to pursue her idea to the finish, no matter how cross he appeared to be.

"Wal, is it *my* fault?" asked Uncle Jabez.

"It's nobody's fault," Ruth told him, shaking her head, and very serious. "But it's Aunt Alvirah's misfortune."

"Huh!"

"And we must do something about it."

"Huh! Must we? What, I'd like to have ye tell me?" said the old miller, eyeing Ruth much as one strange dog might another that he suspected was after his best marrow bone.

"We must get somebody to help her do the work while I am at college," Ruth said firmly.

The dull red flooded into Uncle Jabez's cheeks, and for once gave him a little color. His narrow eyes sparkled, too.

"There's one thing I've allus said, Niece Ruth,"

he declared hotly. "Ye air a great one for spending other folks' money."

It was Ruth's turn to flush now, and although she might not possess what Aunt Alvirah called "the Potter economical streak," she did own to a spark of the Potter temper. Ruth Fielding was not namby-pamby, although she was far from quarrelsome.

"Uncle Jabez," she returned rather tartly, "have I been spending much of *your* money lately?"

"No," he growled. "But ye ain't l'arnt how to take proper keer of yer own—trapsin' 'round the country the way you do."

She laughed then. "I'm getting knowledge. Some of it comes high, I have found; but it will all help me *live*."

"Huh! I've lived without that brand of l'arnin'," grunted Uncle Jabez.

Ruth looked at him amusedly. She was tempted to tell him that he had not lived, only existed. But she was not impudent, and merely went on to say:

"Aunt Alvirah is getting too old to do all the work here——"

"I send Ben in to help her some when she's alone," said the miller.

"And by so doing put extra work on poor Ben," Ruth told him, decidedly. "No, Aunt Alvirah

must have another woman around, or a girl."

"Where ye goin' to find the gal?" snapped the miller. "Work gals don't like to stay in the country."

"She's found, I believe," Ruth told him.

"Huh?"

"This Maggie we just got out of the river. She has no job, she says, and she wants one. I believe she'll stay."

"Who's goin' to pay her wages?" demanded Uncle Jabez, getting back to "first principles" again.

"I'll pay the girl's wages, Uncle Jabez," Ruth said seriously. "But you must feed her. And she must be fed well, too. I can see that part of her trouble is malnutrition."

"Huh? Has she got some ketchin' disease?" Uncle Jabez demanded.

"It isn't contagious," Ruth replied drily. "But unless she is well fed she cannot be cured of it."

"Wal, there's plenty of milk and eggs," the miller said.

"But you must not hide the key of the meat-house, Uncle," and now Ruth laughed outright at him. "Four people at table means a depletion of your smoked meat and a dipping occasionally into the corned-beef barrel."

"Wal——"

"Now, if I pay the girl's wages, you must sup-

ply the food," his niece said, firmly. "Otherwise, Aunt Alvirah will go without help, and then she will break down, and *then*——"

"Huh!" grunted the miller. "I couldn't let her go back to the poorfarm, I s'pose?"

He actually made it a question; but Ruth could not see his face, for he had turned aside.

"No. She could not return to the poorhouse—after fifteen years!" exclaimed the girl. "Do you know what *I* should do?" and she asked the question warmly.

"Somethin' fullish, I allow."

"I should take her to Ardmore with me, and find a tiny cottage for her, and maybe she would keep house for Helen and me."

"That'd be jest like ye, Niece Ruth," he responded coolly. "You think you have all the money in the world. That's because ye didn't airn what ye got—it was give to ye."

The statement was in large part true, and for the moment Ruth's lips were closed. Tears stood in her eyes, too. She realized that she could not be independent of the old miller had not chance and kind-hearted and grateful Mrs. Rachel Parsons given her the bulk of the amount now deposited in her name in the bank.

Ruth Fielding's circumstances had been very different when she had first come to Cheslow and the Red Mill. Then she was a little, homeless,

orphan girl who was "taken in out of charity" by Uncle Jabez. And very keenly and bitterly had she been made to feel during those first few months her dependence upon the crabbed old miller.

The introductory volume of this series, "Ruth Fielding of the Red Mill, or, Jacob Parloe's Secret," details in full the little girl's trials and triumphs under these unfortunate conditions—how she makes friends, smooths over difficulties, and in a measure wins old Uncle Jabez's approval. The miller was a very honest man and always paid his debts. Because of something Ruth did for him he felt it to be his duty to pay her first year's tuition at boarding school, where she went with her new friend, Helen Cameron. In "Ruth Fielding at Briarwood Hall," the Red Mill girl really begins her school career, and begins, too, to satisfy that inbred longing for independence which was so strong a part of her character.

In succeeding volumes of the "Ruth Fielding Series," we follow Ruth's adventures in Snow Camp, a winter lodge in the Adirondack wilderness; at Lighthouse Point, the summer home of a girl friend on the Atlantic coast; at Silver Ranch, in Montana; at Cliff Island; at Sunrise Farm; with the Gypsies, which was a very important adventure, indeed, for Ruth Fielding. In this eighth story Ruth was able to recover for Mrs. Rachel

Parsons, an aunt of one of her school friends, a very valuable pearl necklace, and as a reward of five thousand dollars had been offered for the recovery of the necklace, the entire sum came to Ruth. This money made Ruth financially independent of Uncle Jabez.

The ninth volume of the series, entitled, "Ruth Fielding in Moving Pictures; or, Helping the Dormitory Fund," shows Ruth and her chums engaged in film production. Ruth discovered that she could write a good scenario—a very good scenario, indeed. Mr. Hammond, president of the Alectrion Film Corporation, encouraged her to write others. When the West Dormitory of Briarwood Hall was burned and it was discovered that there had been no insurance on the building, the girls determined to do all in their power to rebuild the structure.

Ruth was inspired to write a scenario, a five-reel drama of schoolgirl life, and Mr. Hammond produced it, Ruth's share of the profits going toward the building fund. "The Heart of a Schoolgirl" was not only locally famous, but was shown all over the country and was even now, after six months, paying the final construction bills of the West Dormitory, at Briarwood.

In this ninth volume of the series, Ruth and Helen and many of their chums graduated from Briarwood Hall. Immediately after the gradu-

ation the girl of the Red Mill and Helen Cameron were taken south by Nettie Parsons and her Aunt Rachel to visit the Merredith plantation in South Carolina. Their adventures were fully related in the story immediately preceding the present narrative, the tenth of the "Ruth Fielding Series," entitled, "Ruth Fielding Down in Dixie; or, Great Times in the Land of Cotton."

Home again, after that delightful journey, Ruth had spent most of the remaining weeks of her vacation quietly at the Red Mill. She was engaged upon another scenario for Mr. Hammond, in which the beautiful old mill on the Lumano would figure largely. She also had had many preparations to make for her freshman year at Ardmore.

Ruth and Helen were quite "young ladies" now, so Tom scoffingly said. And going to college was quite another thing from looking forward to a term at a preparatory school. Nevertheless, Ruth had found plenty of time to help Aunt Alvirah during the past few weeks.

She had noted how much feebler the old woman was becoming. Therefore, she was determined to win Uncle Jabez to her plan of securing help in the Red Mill kitchen. The coming of the girl, Maggie, though a strange coincidence, Ruth looked upon as providential. She urged Uncle Jabez to agree to her proposal, and the very next morning she sounded Maggie upon the subject.

The strange girl was sitting up, but Aunt Alvirah would not hear to her doing anything as yet. Ruth found Maggie in the sitting-room, engaged in looking at the Ardmore Year Book which Ruth had left upon the sitting-room table.

"Pretty landscapes about the college, aren't they?" Ruth suggested.

"Oh yes—Miss. Very pretty," agreed Maggie.

"That is where I am going to college," Ruth explained. "I enter as a freshman next week."

"Is that so—Miss?" hesitated Maggie. Her heretofore colorless face flushed warmly. "I've heard of that—that place," she added.

"Indeed, have you?"

Maggie was looking at the photograph of Lake Remona, with a part of Bliss Island at one side. She continued to stare at the picture while Ruth put before her the suggestion of work at the Red Mill.

"Oh, of course, Miss Fielding, I'd be glad of the work. And you're very liberal. But you don't know anything about me."

"No. And I shouldn't know much more about you if you brought a dozen recommendations," laughed Ruth.

"I suppose not—Miss." It seemed hard for the girl to get out that "Miss," and Ruth, who was keenly observant, wondered if she really had been accustomed to using it.

They talked it over and finally reached an agreement. Aunt Alvirah was sweetly grateful to Ruth, knowing full well that there must have been a "battle royal" between the miller and his niece before the former had agreed to the new arrangement.

Ruth was quite sure that Maggie was a nice girl, even if she was queer. At least, she gave deference to the quaint little old housekeeper, and seemed to like Aunt Alvirah very much. And who would not love the woman, who was everybody's aunt but nobody's relative?

Once or twice Ruth found Maggie poring over the Year Book of Ardmore College, rather an odd interest for a girl of her class. But Maggie was rather an odd girl anyway, and Ruth forgot the matter in her final preparations for departure.

CHAPTER III

EXPECTATIONS

"I EXPECT she'll be a haughty, stuck-up thing," declared Edith Phelps, with vigor.

" 'Just like *that*,' " drawled May MacGreggor. "We should worry about the famous authoress of canned drama! A budding lady hack writer, I fancy."

"Oh, dear me, no!" cried Edith. "Didn't you see 'The Heart of a Schoolgirl' she wrote? Why, it was a good photo-play, I assure you."

"And put out by the Alectrion Film Corporation," joined in another of the group of girls standing upon the wide porch of Dare Hall, one of the four large dormitories of Ardmore College.

The college buildings were set most artistically upon the slope of College Hill, each building facing sparkling Lake Remona. Save the boathouse and the bathing pavilions, Dare and Dorrance Halls at the east side of the grounds, and Hoskin and Hemmingway Halls at the west side, were the structures nearest to the lake.

Farther to the east an open grove intervened between the dormitories and the meadows along the Remona River where bog hay was cut, and which were sometimes flooded in the freshet season.

To the west the lake extended as far as the girls on the porch could see, a part of its sparkling surface being hidden by the green and hilly bulk of Bliss Island. The shaded green lawns of the campus between Dare and Hoskin Halls were crossed by winding paths.

A fleshy girl who was near the group but not of it, had been viewing this lovely landscape with pleasure. Now she frankly listened to the chatter of the "inquisitors."

"Well," Edith Phelps insisted, "this Ruth Fielding was so petted at that backwoods' school where she has been that I suppose there will be no living in the same house with her."

Edith was one of the older sophomores—quite old, indeed, to the eyes of the plump girl who was listening. But the latter smiled quietly, nevertheless, as she listened to the sophomore's speech.

"We shall have to take her down a peg or two, of course. It's bad enough to have the place littered up with a lot of freshies——"

"Just as we littered it up last year at this time, Edie," suggested May, with a chuckle.

"Well," Edith said, laughing, "if I don't put

this Ruth Fielding, the authoress, in her place in a hurry, it won't be because I sha'n't try."

"Have a care, dearie," admonished one quiet girl who had not spoken before. "Remember the warning we had at commencement."

"About what?" demanded two or three.

"About that Rolff girl, you know," said the thoughtful girl.

"Oh! I know what you mean," Edith said. "But that was a warning to the sororities."

"To everybody," put in May.

"At any rate," Dora Parton said, "Dr. Milroth forbade anything in the line of hazing."

"Pooh!" said Edith. "Who mentioned hazing? That's old-fashioned. We're too ladylike at Ardmore, I should hope, to *haze*—my!"

" 'My heye, blokey!' " drawled May.

"You are positively coarse, Miss MacGreggor," Dora said, severely.

"And Edie is so awfully emphatic," laughed the Scotch girl. "But she will have to take it out in threatenings, I fear. We can't haze this Fielding chit, and that's all there is to it."

"Positively," said the quiet girl, "that was a terrible thing they did to Margaret Rolff. She was a nervous girl, anyway. Do you remember her, May?"

"Of course. And I remember being jealous because she was chosen by the Kappa Alpha as

a candidate. Glad *I* wasn't one if they put all their new members through the same rigmarole."

"That is irreverent!" gasped Edith. "The Kappa Alpha!"

"I see Dr. Milroth took them down all right, all right!" remarked another of the group. "And now none of the sororities can solicit members among either the sophs or the freshies."

"And it's a shame!" cried Edith. "The sorority girls have such fun."

"Half murdering innocents—yes," drawled May. "That Margaret Rolff was just about scared out of her wits, they say. They found her wandering about Bliss Island——"

"Sh! We're not to talk of it," advised Edith, with a glance at the fat girl in the background who, although taking no part in the discussion, was very much amused, especially every time Ruth Fielding's name was brought up.

"Well, I don't know why we shouldn't speak of it," said Dora Parton, who was likewise a sophomore. "The whole college knew it at the time. When Margaret Rolff left they discovered that the beautiful silver vase was gone, too, from the library——"

"Oh, hush!" exclaimed May MacGreggor, sharply.

"Won't hush—so now!" said the other girl, smartly, making a face at the Scotch lassie

"Didn't Miss Cullam go wailing all over the college about it?"

"That's so," Edith agreed. "You'd have thought it was her vase that had been stolen."

"I don't believe the vase was stolen at all," May said. "It was mixed up in that initiation and lost. I know that the Kappa Alpha girls are raising a fund to pay for it."

"Pay for it!" scoffed some one. "Why, they couldn't do that in a thousand years. That was an Egyptian curio—very old and very valuable. Pay for it, indeed! Those Kappa Alphas, as well as the other sororities, are paying for their fun in another way."

"But, anyway," said the quiet girl, "it was a terrible experience for Miss Rolff."

"Unless she 'put it on' and got away with the loot herself," said Edith.

"Oh, scissors! *now* who's coarse?" demanded May MacGreggor.

But the conversation came back to the expected Ruth Fielding. These girls had all arrived at Ardmore several days in advance of the opening of the semester. Indeed, it is always advisable for freshmen, especially, to be on hand at least two days before the opening, for there is much preparation for newcomers.

The fleshy girl who had thus far taken no part in the conversation recorded, save to be amused

by it, had already been on the ground long enough to know her way about. But she was not yet acquainted with any of her classmates or with the sophomores.

If she knew Ruth Fielding, she said nothing about it when Edith Phelps began to discuss the girl of the Red Mill again.

"Miss Cullam spoke to me about this Fielding. It seems she has an acquaintance who teaches at that backwoods' school the child went to——"

"Briarwood a backwoods' school!" said May. "Not much!"

"Well, it's somewhere up in New York State among the yaps," declared Edith. "And Cullam's friend wrote her that Fielding is a wonder. Dear me! how I *do* abominate wonders."

"Perhaps we are maligning the girl," said Dora. "Perhaps Ruth Fielding is quite modest."

"What? After writing a moving picture drama? Is there anything modest about the motion picture business in *any* of its branches?"

"Oh, dear me, Edie!" cried one of her listeners, "you're dreadful."

"I presume this canned drama authoress," pursued Edith, "will have ink-stains on her fingers and her hair will be eternally flying about her careworn features. Well! and what are *you* laughing at?" she suddenly and tartly demanded of the plump girl in the background.

"At you," chuckled the stranger.

"Am I so funny to look at?"

"No. But you are the funniest-talking girl I ever listened to. Let me laugh, won't you?"

Before this observation could be more particularly inquired into, some one shouted:

"Oh, look who's here! And in style, bless us!"

"And see the freight! Excess baggage, for a fact," May MacGreggor said, under her breath. "Who *can* she be?"

"The Queen of Sheba in all her glory had nothing on this lady," cried Edith with conviction.

It was not often that any of the Ardmore girls, and especially a freshman, arrived during the opening week of the term in a private equipage. This car that came chugging down the hill to the entrance of Dare Hall was a very fine touring automobile. The girl in the tonneau, barricaded with a huge trunk and several bags, besides a huge leather hat-box perched beside the chauffeur, was very gaily appareled as well.

"Goodness! look at the labels on that trunk," whispered Dora Parton. "Why, that girl must have been all over Europe."

"The trunk has, at any rate," chuckled May.

"Hist!" now came from the excited Edith Phelps. "See the initials. 'R. F.' What did I tell you? It is that Fielding girl."

"Oh, my aunt!" groaned the plump girl in the background, and she actually had to stuff her handkerchief in her mouth to keep from laughing outright again.

The car had halted and the chauffeur got down promptly, for he had to remove some of the "excess baggage" before the girl in the tonneau could alight.

"I guess she must think she belongs here," whispered Dora.

"More likely she thinks she owns the whole place," snapped Edith, who had evidently made up her mind not to like the new girl whose baggage was marked "R. F."

The girl got out and shook out her draperies. A close inspection would have revealed the fact that, although dressed in the very height of fashion (whatever *that* may mean), the materials of which the stranger's costume were made were rather cheap.

"This is Dare Hall, isn't it?" she asked the group of girls above her on the porch. "I suppose there is a porter to help—er—the man with my baggage?"

"It is a rule of the college," said Edith, promptly, "that each girl shall carry her own baggage to her room. No male person is allowed within the dormitory building."

There was a chorused, if whispered, "Oh!"

from the other girls, and the newcomer looked at Edith, suspiciously.

"I guess you are spoofing me, aren't you?" she inquired.

"Help! help!" murmured May MacGreggor. "That's the very latest English slang."

"She's brought it direct from 'dear ol' Lunnon'," gasped one of the other sophomores.

"Dear me!" said Edith, addressing her friends, "wouldn't it be nice to have a 'close up' taken of that heap of luggage? It really needs a camera man and a director to make this arrival a success."

The girl who had just come looked very much puzzled. The chauffeur seemed eager to be gone.

"If I can't help take in the boxes, Miss, I might as well be going," he said to the new arrival.

"Very well," she rejoined, stiffly, and opening her purse gave him a bill. He lifted his cap, entered the car, touched the starter and in a moment the car whisked away.

"I declare!" said May MacGreggor, "she looks just like a castaway on the shore of a desert island, with all the salvage she has been able to recover from the wreck."

And perhaps the mysterious R. F. felt a good deal that way.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

GREENBURG was the station on the N. Y. F. & B. Railroad nearest to Ardmore College. It was a small city of some thirty or forty thousand inhabitants. The people, not alone in the city but in the surrounding country, were a rather wealthy class. Ardmore was a mile from the outskirts of the town.

Ruth Fielding and Helen Cameron, her chum, had arrived with other girls bound for the college on the noon train. Of course, the chums knew none of their fellow pupils by name, but it was easily seen which of those alighting from the train were bound for Ardmore.

There were two large auto-stages in waiting, and Ruth and Helen followed the crowd of girls briskly getting aboard the buses. As they saw other girls do, the two chums from Cheslow gave their trunk checks to a man on the platform, but they clung to their hand-baggage.

"Such a nice looking lot of girls," murmured Helen in Ruth's ear. "It's fine! I'm sure we shall

have a delightful time at college, Ruthie."

"And some hard work," observed Ruth, laughing, "if we expect to keep up with them. There are no dunces in this crowd, my dear."

"Goodness, no!" agreed her friend. "They all look as sharp as needles."

There were girls of all the classes at the station, as was easily seen. Ruth and Helen chanced to get into a seat with two of the seniors, who seemed most awfully sophisticated to the recent graduates of Briarwood Hall.

"You are just entering, are you not—you and your friend?" asked the nearest senior of Ruth.

"Yes," admitted the girl of the Red Mill, feeling and looking very shy.

The young women smiled quietly, saying:

"I am Miss Dexter, and am beginning my senior year. I am glad to be the first to welcome you to Ardmore."

"Thank you so much!" Ruth said, recovering her self-possession. Then she told Miss Dexter her own name and introduced Helen.

"You girls have drawn your room numbers, I presume?"

"They were drawn for us," Ruth said. "We are to be in Dare Hall and hope to have adjoining rooms."

"That is nice," said Miss Dexter. "It is so much pleasanter when two friends enter together.

I am at Hoskin Hall myself. I shall be glad to have you two freshmen look me up when you are once settled."

"Thank you," Ruth said again, and Helen found her voice to ask:

"Are all the seniors in Hoskin Hall, and all the freshmen at Dare Hall?"

"Oh, no. There are members of each class in all four of the dormitories," Miss Dexter explained.

"I suppose there will be much for us to learn," sighed Ruth. "It is different from a boarding school."

"Do you both come from a boarding school?" asked their new acquaintance.

"We are graduates of Briarwood Hall," Helen said, with pride.

"Oh, indeed?" Miss Dexter looked sharply at Ruth again. "Did you say your name was Ruth Fielding?"

"Yes, Miss Dexter."

"Why, you must be the girl who wrote a picture play to help build a dormitory for your school!" exclaimed the senior. "Really, how nice."

"There, Ruth!" said Helen, teasingly, "see what it is to be famous."

"I—I hope my reputation will not be held against me," Ruth said, laughing. "Let me tell

you, Miss Dexter, we all at Briarwood helped to swell that dormitory fund."

"I fancy so," said the senior. "But all of your schoolmates could not have written a scenario which would have been approved by the Alectrion Film Corporation."

"I should say not!" cried Helen, warmly. "And it was a great picture, too."

"It was clever, indeed," agreed Miss Dexter. "I saw it on the screen."

Miss Dexter introduced the girl at the other end of the seat—another senior, Miss Purvis. The two entering freshmen felt flattered—how could they help it? They had expected, as freshmen, to be quite haughtily ignored by the seniors and juniors.

But there were other matters to interest Ruth and Helen as the auto-bus rolled out of the city. The way was very pleasant; there were beautiful homes in the suburbs of Greenburg. And after they were passed, there were lovely fields and groves on either hand. The chums thought they had seldom seen more attractive country, although they had traveled more than most girls of their age.

The road over which the auto-bus rolled was wide and well oiled—a splendid automobile track. But only one private equipage passed them on the ride to Ardmore. That car came along,

going the same way as themselves, just as they reached the first of the row of faculty dwellings.

There was but one passenger in the car—a girl; and she was packed around with baggage in a most surprising way.

"Oh!" gasped Helen, in Ruth's ear, "I guess there goes one of the real fancy girls—the kind that sets the pace at college."

Ruth noticed that Miss Dexter and Miss Purvis craned their necks to see the car and the girl, and she ventured to ask who she was.

"I can't tell you," Miss Dexter said briskly. "I never saw her before."

"Oh! Perhaps, then, she isn't going to the college."

"Yes; she must be. This road goes nowhere else. But she is a freshman, of course."

"An eccentric, I fancy," drawled Miss Purvis. "You must know that each freshman class is bound to have numbered with it some most surprising individuals. *Rarae aves,* as it were."

Miss Dexter laughed. "But the corners are soon rubbed off and their peculiarities fade into the background. When I was a freshman, there entered a woman over fifty, with perfectly white hair. She was a *dear;* but, of course, she was an anomaly at college."

"My!" exclaimed Helen. "What did she want to go to college for?"

"The poor thing had always wanted to go to college. When she was young there were few women's colleges. And she had a big family to help, and finally a bedridden sister to care for. So she remained faithful to her home duties, but each year kept up with the graduating class of a local preparatory school. She was really a very well educated and bright woman; only peculiar."

"And what happened when she came to Ardmore?" asked Ruth, interested. "Is she still here?"

"Oh, no. She remained only a short time. She found, she said, that her mind was not nimble enough, at her age, to keep up with the classes. Which was very probably true, you know. Unless one is constantly engaged in hard mental labor, one's mind must get into ruts by the time one is fifty. But she was very lovely, and quite popular—while she lasted."

Helen was more interested just then in the row of cottages occupied by the members of the faculty, and here strung along the left side of the highway. They were pretty houses, set in pretty grounds.

"Oh, look, Helen!" cried Ruth, suddenly.

"The lake!" responded Helen.

The dancing blue waters of Lake Remona were visible for a minute between two of the houses. Ruth, too, caught a glimpse of the small island

which raised its hilly head in the middle of the lake.

"Is that Bliss Island?" she inquired of Miss Dexter.

"Yes. You can see it from here. That doesn't belong to the college."

"No?" said Ruth, in surprise: "But, of course, the girls can go there?"

"It is 'No Man's Land,' I believe. Belongs to none of the estates surrounding the lake. We go there—yes," Miss Dexter told her. "The Stone Face is there."

"What is that, please?" asked Ruth, interested. "What is the Stone Face?"

"A landmark, Miss Fielding. That Stone Face was quite an important spot last May—wasn't it, Purvis?" the senior asked the other girl.

"Oh, goodness me, yes!" said Miss Purvis. "Don't mention it. Think what it has done to our Kappa Alpha."

"What do you suppose ever became of that girl?" murmured Miss Dexter, thoughtfully.

"I can't imagine. It was a sorry time, take it all in all. Let's not talk of it, Merry. Our sorority has a setback from which it will never recover."

All this was literally Greek to Ruth, of course. Nor did she listen with any attention. There were other things for her and Helen to be inter-

ested in, for the main building of the college had come into view.

They had been gradually climbing the easy slope of College Hill from the east. The main edifice of Ardmore did not stand upon the summit of the eminence. Behind and above the big, winged building the hill rose to a wooded, rounding summit, sheltering the whole estate from the north winds.

Just upon the edge of the forest at the top was an octagon-shaped observatory. Ruth had read about it in the Year Book. From the balcony of this observatory one could see, on a clear day, to the extreme west end of Lake Remona—quite twenty-five miles away.

The newcomers, however, were more interested at present in the big building which faced the lake, half-way down the southern slope of College Hill, and which contained the hall and classrooms, as well as the principal offices. The beautiful campus was in front of this building.

"All off for Dare and Dorrance," shouted the stage driver, stopping his vehicle.

The driveway here split, one branch descending the hill, while the main thread wound on past the front of the main building. Ruth and Helen scrambled down with their bags.

"Good-bye," said Miss Dexter smiling on them. "Perhaps I shall see you when you come

over to the registrar's office. We seniors have to do the honors for you freshies."

Miss Purvis, too, bade them a pleasant good-bye. The chums set off down the driveway. On their left was the great, sandstone, glass-roofed bulk of the gymnasium, and they caught a glimpse of the fenced athletic field behind it.

Ahead were the two big dormitories upon this side of the campus—Dare and Dorrance Halls. The driveway curved around to the front of these buildings, and now the private touring car the girls had before noticed, came shooting around from the lake side of the dormitories, passing Ruth and Helen, empty save for the chauffeur.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Helen. "I wonder if that dressy girl with all the goods and chattels is bunked in *our* dormitory?"

"'Our' dormitory, no less!" laughed Ruth. "Do you feel as much at home already as *that?*"

"Goodness! No. I'm only trying to make myself believe it. Ruth, what an e-*nor*-mous place this is! I feel just as small as—as a little mouse in an elephant's stall."

Ruth laughed, but before she could reply they rounded the corner of the building nearest to the campus and saw the group of girls upon its broad porch, the stranger at the foot of the steps, and the heap of baggage piled where the chauffeur had left it.

"Hello!" May MacGreggor said, aloud, "here are a couple more kittens. Look at the pretty girl with the brown eyes and hair. And the smart-looking, black-eyed one. Now! *here* are freshies after my own heart."

Edith Phelps refused to be called off from the girl and the baggage, however. She said coolly:

"I really don't know what you will do with all that truck, Miss Fielding. The rooms at Dare are rather small. You could not possibly get all those bags and the trunk—and certainly not that hat-box—into one of these rooms."

"My name isn't Fielding," said the strange girl, paling now, but whether from anger or as a forerunner to tears it would have been hard to tell. Her face was not one to be easily read.

"Your name isn't *Fielding?*" gasped Edie Phelps, while the latter's friends burst into laughter. "'R. F.'! What does that stand for, pray?"

At this moment the fleshy girl who had been all this time in the background on the porch, flung herself forward, burst through the group, and ran down the steps. She had spied Ruth and Helen approaching.

"Ruthie! Helen! *Ruth Fielding!* Isn't this delightsome?"

The fleshy girl tried to hug both the chums from Cheslow at once. Edie Phelps and the rest of the girls on the porch gazed and listened in amaze-

ment. Edie turned upon the girl with the heap of baggage, accusingly.

"You're a good one! What do you mean by coming here and fooling us all in this way? What's your name?"

"Rebecca Frayne—if you think you have a right to ask," said the new girl, sharply.

"And you're not the canned drama authoress?"

"I don't know what you mean, I'm sure," said Rebecca Frayne. "But I *would* like to know what I'm to do with this baggage."

Ruth had come to the foot of the steps now with Helen and the fleshy girl, whom the chums had hailed gladly as "Jennie Stone." The girl of the Red Mill heard the speech of the stranger and noted her woebegone accent. She turned with a smile to Rebecca Frayne.

"Oh! I know about that," she said. "Just leave your trunk and bags here and put your card and the number of your room on them. The men will be along very soon to carry them up for you. I read that in the Year Book."

"Thank you," said Rebecca Frayne.

The group of sophomores and freshmen on the porch opened a way for the Briarwood trio to enter the house, and said never a word. Jennie Stone was, as she confessed, grinning broadly.

CHAPTER V

GETTING SETTLED

"WHAT does this mean, Heavy Jennie?" demanded Helen, pinching the very comfortable arm of their fleshy friend.

"What does that mean? Ouch, Helen! You know you're pinching something when you pinch *me.*"

"That's why I like to. No fun in trying to make an impression on bones, you know."

"But it doesn't hurt bones so much," grumbled Jennie. "Remember what the fruit-stand man printed on his sign: 'If you musta pincha da fruit, pincha da cocoanut.' You can't so easy bruise bony folk, Helen."

"You are dodging the issue, Heavy," declared Helen. "What does this mean?"

"What does what mean?" demanded the fleshy girl, grinning widely again.

"How came you here, of course?" Ruth put in, smiling upon their gay and usually thoughtless friend. "You said you did not think you could come to Ardmore."

"And you had conditions to make up if you did come," declared Helen.

"I made 'em up," said Jennie, laughing.

"And you're here ahead of us! Oh, Heavy, what sport!" cried Helen, undertaking to pinch the plump girl again.

"Now, that's enough of that," said Jennie Stone. "I have feelings, as well as other folk, Helen Cameron, despite my name. Have a heart!"

"We are so glad to see you, Heavy," said Ruth. "You mustn't mind Helen's exuberance."

"And you never said a word about coming here when you wrote to us down South," Helen said, eyeing the fleshy girl curiously.

"I didn't know what to do," confessed Jennie Stone. "I talked it over with Aunt Kate. She agreed with me that, if I had finished school, I'd put on about five pounds a month, and that's all I *would* do."

"Goodness!" gasped Ruth and Helen, together.

"Yes," said Heavy, nodding with emphasis. "That's what I did the first month. Nothing to do, you see, but eat and sleep. If I'd had to go to work——"

"But couldn't you find something to do?" demanded the energetic Ruth.

"At Lighthouse Point? You know just how lazy a spot that is. And in winter in the city it

would be worse. So I determined to come here."

"To keep from getting fatter!" cried Helen. "A new reason for coming to college."

"Well," said Jennie, seriously, "I missed the gym work and I missed being uncomfortable."

"Uncomfortable?" gasped Ruth and Helen.

"Yes. You know, my father's a big man, and so are my older brothers big. Everything in our house is big and well stuffed and comfortable—chairs and beds and all. I never was comfortable in my bed at Briarwood."

"Horrible!" cried Helen, while Ruth laughed heartily.

"And *here!*" went on Heavy, lugubriously. "Wait till you see. Do you know, all they give us here is *cots* to sleep on? *Cots,* mind! Goodness! when I try to turn over I roll right out on the floor. You ought to see my sides already, how black-and-blue they are. I've been here two nights."

"Why did you come so early?"

"So as to try to get used to the food and the beds," groaned Heavy. "But I never will. One teacher already has advised me about my diet. She says vegetables are best for me. I ate a peck of string beans this noon for lunch—strings and all—and I expect you can pick basting threads out of me almost anywhere!"

"The teacher didn't advise you to eat *all* the

vegetables there were, did she?" asked Ruth, as they climbed the stairs.

"She did not signify the amount. I just ate till I couldn't get down another one. I sha'n't want to see another string bean for some time."

Ruth and Helen easily found the rooms that had been drawn for them the June previous. Of course, they were not the best rooms in the hall, for the seniors had first choice, and then the juniors and sophomores had their innings before the freshmen had a chance.

But there was a door between Ruth's and Helen's rooms, as they had hoped, and Jennie's room was just across the corridor.

"We Sweetbriars will stick together, all right," said the fleshy girl. "For defence and offence, if necessary."

"You evidently expect to have a strenuous time here, Heavy," laughed Ruth.

"No telling," returned Jennie Stone, wagging her head. "I fancy there are some 'cut-ups' among the sophs who will try to make our sweet young lives miserable. That Edie Phelps, for instance." She told them how the sophomores had met the new girl, Rebecca Frayne, and why.

"Oh, dear!" said Ruth. "But that was all on *my* account. We shall have to be particularly nice to Miss Frayne. I hope she's on our corridor."

"Do you suppose they will haze you, Ruth, just because you wrote that scenario?" asked Helen, somewhat troubled.

"There's no hazing at Ardmore," laughed Ruth. "They can't bother me. 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me!' " she singsonged.

"Just the same," Jennie said, morosely, "that Edie Phelps has a sharp tongue."

"We, too, have tongues," proclaimed Helen, who had no intention of being put upon.

"Now, girls, we want to take just what is handed us good-naturedly," Ruth advised. "We are freshmen. Next year we will be sophomores, and can take it out on the new girls then," and she laughed. "You know, we've all been through it at Briarwood."

Goodness, yes!" agreed Helen. "It can't be as bad at college as it was during our first term at Briarwood Hall."

"This Edie Phelps can't be as mean as The Fox 'useter was,' I suppose," added Jennie Stone. "Besides, I fancy the sophs need us freshmen—our good will and help, I mean. The two lower classes here have to line up against the juniors and seniors."

"Oh, dear, me," sighed Ruth. "I hoped we had come here to study, not to fight."

"Pooh!" said the fleshy girl, "where do you go

in this world that you don't have to fight for your rights? You never get something for nothing."

However, the possibility of trouble disturbed their minds but slightly. For the rest of the day the trio were very busy. At least, Ruth and Helen were busy arranging their rooms and unpacking, and Jennie Stone was busy watching them.

They went to the registrar's office that day, as this was required. Otherwise, they were in their rooms, after their baggage was delivered, occupied until almost dinner time. Heavy had been on the ground long enough, as she said, to know most of the ropes. They were supposed to dress rather formally for dinner, although not more than two-thirds of the girls had arrived.

There were in Dare Hall alone as many pupils as had attended Briarwood altogether. This was, indeed, a much larger school life on which they were entering.

So many of the girls they saw were older than themselves—and the trio of girls had been among the oldest girls at Briarwood during their last semester.

"Why, we're only *kids*," sighed Helen. "There's a girl on this corridor—at the other end, thank goodness!—who looks old enough to be a teacher."

"Miss Comstock," said Heavy. "I know. She's a senior. There are no teachers rooming

at Dare. Only the housekeeper downstairs. But you'll find a senior at the head of each table—and Miss Comstock looks awfully stern."

Ruth and Helen found the rooms they were to occupy rather different from those they had chummed in at Briarwood. In the first place, these rooms were smaller, and the furniture was very plain. As Jennie had warned them, there were only cots to sleep upon—very nice cots, it was true, and there was a heavy coverlet for each, to turn the cots into divans in the daytime.

"I tell you what we can do," Ruth suggested at the start. "Let's make one room the study, and both sleep in the other."

"Bully idea," agreed Helen.

They proceeded to do this, the result being a very plain sleeping room, indeed, but a well-furnished study. They had brought with them all the pennants and other keepsakes from Briarwood, and sofa pillows and cushions for the chairs, and innumerable pictures.

Before night the study looked as homelike as the old room had at the preparatory school. They had rugs, too, and one big lounging chair, purchased second-hand, that Heavy had, of course, occupied most of the afternoon.

"Well! I hope you've finished at last," sighed the fleshy girl when the warning bell for dinner rang. "I'm about tired out."

"You should be," agreed Ruth, commiseratingly. "You've helped so much."

"Advising is harder than moving furniture and tacking up pictures," proclaimed Jennie. "Brain-fag is the trouble with me and hunger."

"We admit the final symptom," said Helen. "But if your brain is ever fagged, Heavy, it will only be from thinking up new and touching menus. Come on, now, we're going to scramble into some fresh frocks. You go and do the same, Miss Lazybones."

CHAPTER VI

MISS CULLAM'S TROUBLE

RUTH and Helen were much more amply supplied with frocks of a somewhat dressy order than when they began a semester at Briarwood Hall. Their wardrobes here were well filled, and of course there was no supervision of what they wore as there had been at the preparatory school.

When they went downstairs to the dining-room with Jennie Stone, they found they had made no mistake in "putting their best foot forward," as Helen called it.

"My! I feel quite as though I were going to a party," Ruth confessed.

The girls rustled through the corridors and down the wide stairways, laughing and talking, many of the freshmen, it was evident, already having made friends.

"There's that girl," whispered Jennie Stone, suddenly.

"What girl?" asked Helen.

"Oh! the girl with all the luggage," laughed Ruth.

"Yes," said the fleshy girl. "What was her name?"

"Rebecca Frayne," said Ruth, who had a good memory.

She bowed to the rather over-dressed freshman. She saw that nobody was walking with Rebecca Frayne.

"I hope she sits at our table," Ruth added.

"Of course," Helen rejoined, with a smile, "Ruth has already spied somebody to be good to."

"Shucks!" said Jennie. "I don't think she'd make a particularly pleasant addition to our party."

"What does *that* matter?" demanded Helen, roguishly. "Ruth is always picking up the sore-eyed kittens."

"I think that is unkind," returned Ruth, shaking her head. "Maybe Miss Frayne is a very nice girl."

"I wonder what she's got in all those bags and the big trunk?" said Jennie. "I see she's wearing the same dress she traveled in."

"I wager she misses her maid," sighed Helen. "Can't dress without one, I s'pose."

But there were too many other girls to watch and to comment on for the trio to give much attention to Rebecca Frayne. Ruth, however, said, with a little laugh:

"I must feel some interest in her. Her initials are the same as mine."

"And her arrival certainly took the curse off yours, my dear," Jennie agreed. "Edie Phelps and her crowd were laying for you and no mistake."

"I wonder if we shouldn't eschew all slang now that we have come to Ardmore?" Helen suggested demurely.

"You set the example then, my lady!" cried Heavy.

Miss Comstock, the very severe looking senior, sat at the table at which the Briarwood trio of freshmen found their numbers; but Miss Frayne was at the housekeeper's table. There were ten or twelve girls at each table and throughout the meal a pleasant hum of voices filled the room.

Ruth and Helen, not to mention their fleshy chum, were soon at their ease with their neighbors; nor did Miss Comstock prove such a bugaboo as they feared. Although the senior was a particularly silent girl, she had a pleasant smile and was no wet blanket upon the enjoyment of the dinner. At least, she did not serve as a wet blanket upon Jennie Stone. The fleshy girl's appetite betrayed the fact that she had been stinted at noon, and that a diet of string beans was scarcely a satisfactory one.

As they left the dining-room and came out into

the wide, well-lighted entrance hall of the house, a lady just entering bowed to Jennie Stone.

"There she is!" groaned the fleshy girl. "Caught in the act!"

"Who is she, Heavy?" demanded Helen, in an undertone.

"She looks nice," observed Ruth.

"Miss Cullam. She's the one that advised the string beans," declared Jennie out of the corner of her mouth. Then she added, most cordially: "Oh! how do you do! These are my two chums from Briarwood—Ruth Fielding and Helen Cameron. Miss Cullam, girls."

The teacher, who was rather elderly, but very brisk and neat, if not wholly attractive, approached smiling.

"You will meet me in mathematics, young ladies," she said, shaking hands with the two introduced freshmen. "And how are you to-night, Miss Stone? Have you stuck to your vegetable diet, as I advised?"

Heavy made her jolly, round face seem as long as possible, and groaned hollowly.

"Oh, Miss Cullam!" she said, "I believe I could have stuck to the diet, if——"

"Well, if what?" demanded the teacher.

"If the diet would only stick to *me*. But it doesn't. I ate *pecks* of string beans for lunch, and by the middle of the afternoon I felt like a

castaway after two weeks upon a desert island."

"Nonsense, Miss Stone!" exclaimed the teacher, yet laughing too. Heavy was so ridiculous that it was impossible not to be amused. "You should practise abstinence. Really, you are the very fattest girl at Ardmore, I do believe."

"That sounds horrid!" declared Jennie with sudden vigor, and she did not look pleased.

"You may as well face the truth, my dear," said the mathematics teacher, eyeing the distressing curves of the fleshy girl without prejudice. "Here are upwards of a thousand girls—or will be when all have arrived and registered. And you will be locally famous."

"Oh, don't!" groaned Ruth.

"Poor Heavy!" gasped Helen.

Miss Cullam uttered a short laugh.

"Your friends evidently love you, my dear," she said, patting the fleshy girl's plump cheek. "But you want to make new friends—you wish to be admired, I know. It will not be pleasant to gain the reputation of being Ardmore's heavyweight, will it?"

"It sounds pretty bad," admitted Heavy, coming out of her momentary slough of despond. "But we all have our little troubles, don't we, Miss Cullam?"

Somehow this question seemed to quench the teacher of mathematics' good spirits. A cloud

settled upon her countenance, and she nodded seriously.

"We all have; true enough, Miss Stone," she said. "And I hope you, as pupils at Ardmore, will never suffer such disturbance of mind as I, a teacher, sometimes do."

Ruth, who had started up the stairway next to the teacher, put a friendly hand upon Miss Cullam's arm. "I hope we three will never add to your burdens, my dear Miss Cullam," she whispered.

The instructor flashed a rather wondering look at the girl of the Red Mill; then she smiled. It was a grouty person, indeed, who could look into Ruth Fielding's frank countenance and not return her smile.

"Bless you! I have heard of you already, Ruth Fielding. I have no idea I shall be troubled by you or your friends." They had fallen behind the others a few steps. "But we never can tell. Since last term—well!"

Much, evidently, was on Miss Cullam's mind; yet she kept step with Ruth when they came to the corridor on which the rooms of the three Briarwoods opened. Ruth could always find something pleasant to say. This woman with the care-graved countenance smiled whimsically as she listened. keeping at the girl's shoulder.

Evidently somewhat oppressed by the atten-

tions of the instructor, Helen and Heavy had disappeared into the fleshy girl's room.

"Do come in and see how nicely we have fixed our sitting-room—study, I mean, of course," and Ruth laughed, opening the door.

"Looks homelike," confessed Miss Cullam. Then, with a startled glance around the room, she murmured: "Why, it's the very room!"

"What is that you say?" asked Ruth, curiously.

"Do you know who had this room last year?"

"Of course I haven't the first idea," returned the girl of the Red Mill.

"Miss Rolff."

"Do I know her?" asked Ruth, somewhat puzzled.

"She left before the end of the term. I—I am not sure just what the matter was with her. But she is connected in my mind with a great misfortune."

"Indeed, Miss Cullam?" said the sympathetic Ruth.

It was, perhaps, the sympathy in her tone that urged the instructor to confide her trouble to a strange girl—a freshman, at that!

"I hope I shall never have the same fears and doubts regarding you and your friends, Miss Fielding, that I have felt about some of these girls who are now sophomores—and some of the juniors, too."

"Oh, Miss Cullam! What do you mean?"

"Well, I'll tell you, my dear," the teacher said, taking the comfortable chair at Ruth's gestured recommendation, as the girl switched on the electricity. "You seem like an above-the-average sensible girl——"

Ruth laughed at that, but she dimpled, too, and Miss Cullam joined in the laughter.

"Some of these girls were mere flyaways," she said. "But not many, after all. Girls who come as far as college, even to the freshman course in college, usually have something in their pretty noddles besides ideas for dressing their hair.

"Well, I will confide in you, as I say, because I have a fancy to. I like you. Listen to the troubles of a poor mathematics instructor."

"Yes, Miss Cullam," said Ruth, demurely.

"You see, my dear," said Miss Cullam, who had a whimsical way about her that Ruth had begun to delight in, "after all, we college instructors are all necessarily of the race of watch dogs."

"Oh, Miss Cullam!"

"Our girls are put upon their honor and are in the main worthy of our confidence. But we have experiences that show us how frail human virtue is.

"For instance, there are examinations. A most trying necessity are examinations. They come mainly toward the close of the college year, and

a few of our girls are not prepared to pass.

"Last year I felt that some of my freshmen and sophomores could not possibly comply with the mathematical requirements. When I received from the printers my copies of the questions to be proposed to the classes I really felt that a few of my girls were going to have a hard time," and she smiled again, yet there was still trouble in her eyes.

"I chanced to be in the library when I received the papers. You have not seen our library yet, have you, Miss Fielding?"

"No, Miss Cullam. You know, Helen and I arrived only this afternoon at Ardmore."

"That is so. Well, the library is a very beautifully furnished building. It was a gift from certain alumni. I was alone in the reception-room when I examined the papers, and being called suddenly to a duty and not wishing to take the papers with me, I rolled them up and thrust them into a vase standing upon the table. When I returned in a few minutes, still hurried by a task before me, I found that I had thrust the papers so far into the small-mouthed vase that I could not reach them. Quite a ridiculous situation, was it not?

"But now the plot thickens," went on the teacher, with a sigh. "The papers were safe enough there, of course. The vase was a very

beautiful and valuable silver one, and had its place of honor on that table. I could not stop to retrieve the question papers with a pair of tongs—as I might, had I not been hurried. When I returned armed with the tongs in the morning——"

"Yes, Miss Cullam?" rejoined Ruth, interestedly, as the teacher paused in her story.

"The vase—and, of course, the question papers—was gone," said the lady, in a sepulchral tone.

"Oh!"

"And almost all the girls I had marked for failure in mathematics went through the examination with colors flying!"

"Oh!' exclaimed Ruth again, and quite blankly.

"Do you see the terrible suspicion that has been eating at my mind ever since? There happened to be other unfortunate matters connected with the disappearance of the vase, too. *It* has never been found. One of the very freshmen who I feared would fail in the examination left the college under a cloud."

"Oh, Miss Cullam!" gasped Ruth. "Is she suspected of stealing the vase—and the examination papers?"

"I scarcely know what to say in answer to that," said Miss Cullam, gravely. "It seems that

one of the sororities was initiating candidates on that night. One of the—er—'stunts,' as they call their ridiculous ceremonies, included the filching of this vase after dark and its burial somewhere on Bliss Island. So Dr. Milroth later informed me.

"The girl chosen for this ridiculous performance, Miss Rolff, who occupied this very room, was found at daybreak wandering alone upon the island in a hysterical condition. She insisted upon leaving the college immediately, before I had discovered the absence of the vase and the missing papers.

"I felt that I could not arouse suspicion in Dr. Milroth's mind by mentioning the papers. I secured copies from the printer. Of course, it is all ancient history now, my dear," ended the mathematics teacher, with a sigh. "But you see, suspicion once fastened upon my mind, it still troubles me."

"But what became of the poor girl?" asked Ruth, sympathetically.

"That I cannot tell you," Miss Cullam said, rising. "She has not returned this year, and I understand that Dr. Milroth lost trace of her."

CHAPTER VII

FAME IS NOT ALWAYS AN ASSET

JUST why the teacher of mathematics had taken Ruth Fielding into her confidence upon this rather curious event, it would be hard to say. Teachers are human like other people, and perhaps sometimes prone to gossip.

However, Ruth felt that it was a confidence, and she did not mention the matter of the missing examination papers to her chum or to Jennie Stone. The other Briarwood girls were the only members of the freshman class Ruth was likely to be intimate with for some days.

Friendships are not made so quickly at college as at smaller schools. There were so many girls that it took some time for the trio to adjust themselves and to become acquainted with their mates.

In the morning they went again to the registrar's office, and there they met Miss Dexter, who was appointed to escort them about, show them the college offices, the bookstore, and introduce them to such of the instructors as came in the path of the new girls.

Of course, their tuition fees—one hundred and seventy-five dollars each—for the year had been already paid. Their board would be nine dollars weekly, and all books, stationery, gymnastic suits and supplies, as well as medical and hospital fees (if they chanced to be ill) would be extra.

There were only a few simple rules of behavior to note. If a girl is not well trained in ladylike demeanor before arriving at the college age she is, of course, hopeless. The faculty have other things to do besides watching the manners as well as the mental attributes, of the students.

Ruth and her friends learned that they were not to leave the college grounds before six in the morning.

"And who'd want to?" demanded Heavy. "That's the best time to sleep."

However, the fleshy girl soon learned that if she was to have a reasonable time for breakfast she must be up betimes. The meal was served from seven to a quarter to eight. Chapel was at eight-thirty, but not compulsory. Recitations began at nine and lunch was at twelve.

Recitations and lectures (these latter did not interest our freshmen, for they had no lectures the first year) ended at three-thirty, when all the girls were supposed to take gymnastics of some kind. Otherwise, their time was their own until dinner at six o'clock.

The girls had the time free from seven till seven-thirty. The following two hours were those devoted to quiet study (or should be) in their own rooms, or in the reference department of the library. At ten all were supposed to retire.

The students might leave the grounds at any time during the day, but never in the evening without a chaperon. These rules and requirements seemed easy enough to the trio from Briarwood Hall, used as they were to the far stricter oversight of the teachers in the preparatory institution.

More girls appeared at Ardmore that day, and the one following would see the opening of the semester and, as Jennie Stone said, "the buckling down to real work." A notice was posted on the bulletin boards already commanding all freshmen to meet at Hoskin Hall after dinner that evening, signed by the president of the sophomore class.

"What's *she* got to do with *us?*" Helen demanded, with a sniff.

"Aren't we allowed to run our own class affairs here?" Heavy asked.

"I fancy not," Ruth rejoined. "Miss Dexter told me that the sophs and freshies were usually lined up against the two older classes. The sophs need us, and we need them."

"I have an idea," said Heavy, with a warning

shake of her head, "that some of the sophs don't care so much for us."

The trio were returning from the college hall as they chatted. Helen suddenly exclaimed:

"Girls! did you ever see so many tam-o'-shanters in your little lives? And such a wealth of colors?"

It was true that every girl in sight (and there were "just hundreds!" to quote Heavy again), unless she were bareheaded, wore a tam-o'-shanter.

"The most popular thing in head covering at Ardmore this year, that is sure," said Ruth.

"Oh! will you look at the one that Frayne girl is wearing?" Helen gasped.

"Goodness!" said Heavy. "Looks like an Italian sunset."

"Or a badly scrambled egg," put in Helen. "There! I believe that girl would look a fright whatever she put on."

"She can't help her taste, poor girl," Ruth said.

"My!" sighed Heavy. "I like to hear you talk, Ruth. You're as full of excuses for everybody criticised as a chestnut is of meat," and she nibbled one of the nuts in question as she spoke. Then:

"Wow! Oh, the nasty thing!"

Helen laughed uproariously. "Something besides meat in that chestnut, Heavy. Did it squirm much?"

"Don't ask me," said the fleshy girl, gloomily. "Of such is life! 'I never owned a gay gazelle'——"

"Cut it out. You never owned a gazelle of any kind," said Helen. "You know you never did."

It was just here that the trio came upon a group of girls of whom Edith Phelps was evidently the leader. It was opposite the gymnasium, under the wide-spreading oaks that gave shade to that quarter of the campus. The Briarwood girls had been about to enter the gymnasium building to look around.

Edith and her friends were mostly in gymnasium costumes. They had been tossing the medicine ball; but it was plain that they had gathered here near the path the three freshmen friends followed, for a purpose.

"Oh, here comes the leading lady!" cried Edith Phelps, in a high and affected voice. "Get set! Camera!"

The girls, or most of them, struck most ridiculous attitudes at Edie's word, while an oblong, black box suddenly appeared, affixed upon a tripod, and May MacGreggor, who was out for fun as much as any of the sophomores, began to turn a tiny crank on one side of the box.

"Hi! what are you trying to do—you fat person there?" demanded Edie, excitedly, imitating a movie director, and waving back the amazed

and somewhat angry Jennie Stone. "Want to crab the film?"

"Oh, the mean things!" gasped Helen, growing as red as though the joke were aimed directly at herself.

"Cracky!" murmured the fleshy girl, who couldn't help seeing the ridiculous side of it. "Isn't that funny?"

At the moment, too, a thin little tune began to wander from the black box, none other than "The Wearing of the Green." Inside the box was one of those little, old-fashioned Swiss music boxes, and May was industriously turning the crank.

"Register fear, Miss Fielding!" shouted Edith, energetically. "Fear, I say! Don't you realize that you are about to be flung over a cliff and that a mad bull is waiting bel-o-o-w to catch you on his horns? Close up of the bull, please!"

Ruth had been first surprised, then not a little displeased; but she knew instinctively if she showed that this buffoonry offended and troubled her it would only be repeated again and again.

Much better able than her chum, Helen Cameron, to control her features, she began now to smile broadly.

"Girls!" she said aloud to her two friends, "it must be that that girl knows Mr. Grimes personally or has seen him at work. You remember Mr.

Grimes, the Alectrion director who filmed our play at Briarwood?"

"And was so nasty to Hazel Gray? I should say!" exclaimed Jennie, instantly falling in with Ruth's attempt to pass the incident off as a joke.

"I think *she's* nasty-mean," muttered Helen, her black eyes snapping.

"If you played that tune while making a film for me, Miss MacGreggor, I should want to jig," Heavy cried, and started to do a few ridiculous steps in front of the black box.

Ruth continued to smile, too, saying to Edith Phelps: "You might have warned us of this. I'd have liked to primp a little before posing for the camera."

The other girls laughed. It did not take much to make them laugh, and it is possible that they laughed as much at Edie as with her. But as the trio of freshmen went on toward Dare Hall, Ruth shook her head doubtfully.

"What's the matter, Ruthie?" asked Helen, squeezing her arm. "The mean things!"

"I wonder," murmured Ruth.

"You wonder what?" demanded Helen.

Ruth sighed. "I guess fame isn't always an asset," she said.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STONE FACE

RUTH knew better than to show anger over any such silly joke. If she was to be made the laughing stock of her class by the sophomores, she might as well face it and bear the cross good-naturedly.

Ruth was as sensitive as any refined girl. It hurt her to be ridiculed. But she had not spent years at boarding school without learning that the best way—indeed, the only way—to bear successfully such indignity is to ignore it. That is, to ignore the fun poked at one as far as possible. To bear the jokes with a smile. So she would not allow her friends to comment much upon this scene before the gymnasium building.

She had never given herself airs because of her success in writing scenarios. Another girl might have done so. But Ruth was naturally modest, and had never really ceased to be surprised at her own success.

The new scenario she was at work upon, the scenes of which were laid at the Red Mill, was

born of an idea she had evolved when her attention had first been turned to motion-picture writing.

Mr. Hammond, her kind friend and the president of the Alectrion Film Corporation, had advised her to postpone the use of this idea until she had tried her apprentice hand on other and simpler scenarios. The time seemed ripe now, however, for the writing of "Crossed Wires," and he had encouraged her to go ahead.

All the visible effect Edith Phelps' joke had upon Ruth was to send her to the unfinished scenario. After returning from the college offices on this occasion she worked on her play until lunch time.

"There's too much new to see and to do for you to pore over letter writing, Ruth," Helen declared, misunderstanding her friend's occupation. "We want to see Ardmore. We want to go out on the lake if we can get a boat. We've got to see the gym and the library. And to-night we must turn up at this meeting, it seems, and see what Miss Dunstan, the soph president, has to say to us freshies."

"Oh, I want to go out on the lake!" cried Ruth, agreeing. "And I want to explore that island."

"What island?" demanded Jennie, coming into the chums' study.

"Bliss Island."

" 'Tisn't part of the college grounds," said the fleshy girl.

"Don't care. Want to see it," declared Ruth. "I hope we can get a boat. I didn't see many in use this morning."

"Some of the girls own their own. Especially canoes," said Jennie Stone. "But it's *the* thing to make the 'eight.' Let me tell you, us Ardmores are supposed to be some rowists! Our first eight beat the Gillings College first eight last June."

"We'll all try for the eight then," Helen said.

"And *you*, Jennie?" asked Ruth, mildly.

"Oh, *me!*"

"String beans for yours, Heavy," Helen cried, clapping her hands. "You'll have to diet on them until you have reduced to little more than a string yourself if you expect to make the eight."

"Bet I could do it," grumbled Heavy.

"A bet's a bet!" cried Helen. "I take you."

"Don't be rude, girls," advised Ruth. "You sound like regular, sure-enough gamblers. And, anyway, Heavy will never be able to make the eight. She might as well pay her wager now."

"Oh! oh! oh!" laughed Helen. "A palpable hit!"

"You just see!" said Heavy, firmly. "I'll show you."

"My dear," Ruth said, "if you show us a sylph-

like form in time to make the freshman eight——"

"It will be the eighth wonder of the world," finished Helen.

Jennie tossed her head. "I don't know about the sylph-like form, but at least I mean to possess a slender figure when I have followed Miss Cullam's advice on diet. You'll see!"

"Poor Heavy!" groaned Helen. "She is letting herself in for a most awful time, and no mistake."

After luncheon the three girls set forth to explore the place.

"If I keep this up I'll need nothing else to get me thin. We have tramped miles," the fleshy girl announced at length. "Oh! my poor, poor feet!"

"Wear sensible shoes, then," said Helen, who was the very last person to follow her own advice on this point.

"Easy enough to say," groaned Jennie. "There ain't any such an animal! You know that in this day and generation shoe makers have ceased to make sensible shoes. I look at 'em in the shop windows," pursued the aching girl, "and I wonder what sort of foot the human pedal extremity will become in a generation or two. Those pointed toes!

"Why," declared the suddenly warmed up Jennie Stone, "they tell us about a two-toed sloth liv-

ing in Central and South America. Believe *me!* the present-day shoemaker seems to have secured a last to fit a *one*-toed sloth."

"I don't know about the number of their toes," Ruth said, laughing; "but many of those who wear the fancy shoes are *sloths,* all right."

They had looked over the library before this, and walked down past Hoskin and Hemmingway Halls on the west side of the campus, and so reached the lake. There were some girls at the boathouse, and a few craft were out. It was possible for the three friends to get a boat and Ruth and Helen rowed, with Heavy lazily reclining in the stern.

"Beginning that strenuous life that is to reduce your weight, Heavy?" questioned Helen.

"I am practising deep breathing," Jennie said. "They say that helps a lot."

They headed the light skiff directly for Bliss Island. It was not more than a mile off shore, and was a beautiful place. At the landing they saw several girls whom they knew were sophomores, for among them was May MacGreggor.

"Here are some more of Cook's Trippers," said the Scotch girl, gaily. "Seeing the sights, *mes infantes?*"

"Trying to," Jennie announced. "But you're really not so bad looking, Miss MacGreggor. I wouldn't call you a 'sight.' "

"Now, that will be all of that, Miss Stone!" exclaimed the sophomore, but her brown eyes danced as the other girls laughed. "I believe you three girls are Briarwoods, are you not?"

"Yes," Helen said.

"I can believe it," said May. "I have felt the briers. Now, let us call a truce."

"With all my heart, Miss MacGreggor," Ruth said quickly.

"You're a good little thing!" returned the Scotch girl. "I know your heart is big enough. And we sophs really shouldn't nag you freshies, you know, for we must pull together against the seniors and juniors. But you'll hear about that to-night."

"Thank you, Miss MacGreggor," Ruth said. "And now that we are at this island, would you mind telling us where the Stone Face is situated?"

"Ah! one of the wonders of the place," said May. "And who told you about the Stone Face, Freshie?"

"I have heard it is well worth seeing," said Ruth, demurely.

"I will be your escort," said May.

They found the Scotch girl very companionable. She led them up a rugged path through the trees and around the rocks.

"And did that girl have to come up here—*and in the dark?*" murmured Ruth at last.

"What girl?" Helen asked.

"Who are you talking about, Miss Fielding?" asked the sophomore.

"That girl—Miss Rolff."

"Oh! don't mention her name!" groaned May MacGreggor. "If it hadn't been for *her*, you-uns and we-uns wouldn't be cut out of the sororities. A wicked shame!"

"Oh, I've heard about that," said Jennie, puffing because of the hard climb. "Did she really have to come here, and *alone,* when she was initiated?"

"She started for here," said May, gloomily. "With a flashlight, I believe. But she lost her nerve——

"There! there's the rock you're looking for."

It was a huge boulder in an open field. At the angle from which they viewed it, the face of the rock really bore some semblance to a human countenance—the features of an old, old woman.

"Ugly old hag!" was May MacGreggor's comment upon the odd boulder.

CHAPTER IX

GETTING ON

THE three freshmen friends from Briarwood learned a good deal more that evening than the Year Book would ever have taught them. The girls began to crowd into the Hoskin Hall dining-room right after dinner. The seniors and the juniors disappeared, but there were a large number of sophomores present, besides the president of that class who addressed the freshmen.

The latter learned that in athletics especially the rivalry between the two lower and the two upper classes was intense. It was hardly possible, of course, for any of the freshmen, and for few of the sophomores to gain positions on any of the first college teams in basket ball, rowing, tennis, archery, or other important activities of a physical nature.

All athletic sports, which included, as well as those named above, running and jumping and other track work, were under the direct supervision of the college athletic association. All the girls could belong to that. Indeed, they were ex-

pected to, and the fees were small. But for a freshman to show sufficient athletic training to make any of the first teams, would almost seem impossible. They could get on the scrubs and possess their souls with patience, hoping to win places on the first teams perhaps in their sophomore year.

However, there had once been a girl in a freshman class at Ardmore who succeeded in throwing the hammer a record-making distance; and once a freshman had been bow oar in the first eight. These were targets to aim for, Miss Dunstan, the sophomore president, told the new girls.

She was, of course, a member of the athletic committee, and having told the new girls all about the sports she proceeded to advise them about organizing their class and electing officers. This should be done by the end of the first fortnight. Meanwhile, the freshman should get together, become acquainted, and electioneer for the election of officers.

Class politics at Ardmore meant something. There were already groups and cliques forming among the freshmen. It was an honor to hold office in the class, and those who were ambitious, or who wished to control the policy of the class, were already at work.

Ruth and her friends were so ambitious in quite another direction—in two, in fact—that they

rather overlooked these class activities. The following day actually opened the work of the semester, and as they already had their books the trio settled immediately to their lessons.

They were taking the classical course, a four-years' course. During this first year their studies would be English, a language (their choice of French or German) besides the never-to-be-escaped Latin; mathematics, including geometry, trigonometry and higher algebra. They had not yet decided whether to take botany or chemistry as the additional study.

"We want to keep together as much as possible, in classes as well as out," Helen said. "Let's take the same specials, too."

"I vote for botany," Ruth suggested. "That will take us into the woods and fields more."

"You mean, it will give us an excuse for going into the woods and fields," Jennie said. "I'm with you. And if I have to walk much to cut down weight, it will help."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Helen. "Heavy really *has* come to college to get rid of her superabundance of fat."

"Surest thing you know," agreed the fleshy girl.

The freshmen learned that they would have from fifteen to eighteen recitation periods weekly, of forty-five minutes each. The recitation periods

occurred between nine and twelve in the forenoon and one and three-thirty in the afternoon.

It took several days to get all these things arranged rightly; the three friends managed to get together in all classes. The classes numbered from twenty to forty students and the girls began to get acquainted with the teachers very quickly. Trust youth for judging middle-age almost immediately.

"I like Dr. McCurdy," Helen said, speaking of their English instructor, who was a man. "He knows what he's about and goes right at it. No fooling with him. None of this, 'Now young ladies, I hope you are pleasantly situated and that we are going to be good friends.' Pah!"

Ruth laughed. "The dear old things!" she said gaily. "They mean well—even that Miss Mara, whom you are imitating. And she *does* have a beautiful French accent, if she *is* Irish."

They liked Dr. Frances Milroth. Her talk in chapel was an inspiration, and that first morning some of the girls came out into the sunshine with wet eyelashes. They began to realize that they were here at college for something besides either play or ordinary study. They were at Ardmore to learn to get a grip on life.

Instrumental and vocal music could be taken at any time which did not interfere with the regular recitations, and of course Ruth took the latter

as a special, while Helen did not neglect her violin.

"I guess I'll take up the study of the oboe," grumbled Jennie Stone. "I don't seem to know just what to do with myself while you girls are making sweet sounds."

"Why don't you roll, Heavy?" demanded Helen.

"Roll *what?* Roll a hoop?" asked the fleshy girl.

"No. Roll a barrel, I should say would be nearer to it," Helen responded, eyeing Jennie's plump waistline reflectively. "Get down and roll. Move back the furniture, give yourself plenty of room, and *roll.* They say that will reduce one's curves."

"Wow! And what would the girl say downstairs under me?" asked Jennie Stone. "I'd begin by being the most unpopular girl in this freshman class."

These first few days were busy ones; but the girls of the freshman class were fast learning just where they stood. Then happened something that awoke most of the class to the fact that they needed to get together, that they must, after all, take up cudgels for themselves.

"Just like a flock of silly sheep, running together when they see a dog," Helen at first said.

"I guess there is a good reason in nature for

sheep to do that," Ruth said, on reflection. "Sheep fear wolves more than any other animal, and a dog is a wolf, after all, only domesticated."

"Huh!" grunted Jennie. "Then we are sheep and the seniors are wolves, are they? I could eat up most of these seniors I've seen, myself. I will be a savage sheep—woof! woof!"

The matter that had made the disturbance, however, was not to be ignored.

CHAPTER X

A TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT

ARRANGEMENTS for the organization of the freshman class had lagged.

This fact may have been behind the notice put upon the bulletin boards all over the Ardmore grounds some time after bedtime one evening and before the rising bell rang the next morning. It intimated a bit of hazing, but hazing of a quality that the faculty could only wink at.

The notice was as follows:

FRESHMEN

It is the command of the Senior Class of Ardmore that no Freshman shall appear within the college grounds wearing a tam-o'-shanter of any other hue save the herewith designated color, to wit: Baby Blue. This order is for the mental and spiritual good of the incoming class of Freshmen. Any member of said class refusing to obey this order will be summarily dealt with by the upper classes of Ardmore.

Groups gathered immediately after breakfast about the bulletin boards. Of course, the seniors and juniors passed by with dignified bearing, and without comment. The sophomores remained upon the outskirts of the groups of excited freshmen to laugh and jeer.

"A disturbed bumblebees' nest could have hummed no louder," Helen declared, as the three friends walked up to chapel, which they made a point of attending.

"Why! to think of the *cheek* of those seniors!" ejaculated Jennie. "And the juniors are just as bad!"

"What are you going to do about that tam of yours, Heavy?" asked Ruth, slily. "It's a gay thing—nothing like baby blue."

"Oh well," growled the fleshy girl, "baby blue is one of my favorite colors."

"Mine, too," said Ruth, drily.

"Oh, girls! Are you going to give right in—*so* easy?" gasped Helen.

"I don't feel like making myself conspicuous," Ruth said. "You can wager that most of our class will hustle right off and get the proper hue in tams."

"Then we'd better go to town this very afternoon," Jennie cried, in haste, "and see if we can find three of baby blue shade. The stores will be drained of them by to-morrow."

"But to give—right—in!" wailed Helen, who dearly loved a fight.

"No. It isn't that. But, as the advertisements say: 'Eventually, so why not now?' We'll have to come to it. Let's get our tams while the tamming's good."

Helen could not see the reason for obeying the senior order; but she could see no reason, either, for not following her chum's lead. The three girls telephoned for a taxicab, which came to Dare Hall for them at half past three.

They were not the only girls going to town; but some of the freshmen, like Helen, wished to display their independence and refused—as yet—to obey the senior command.

A line at the bottom of the notice announced that three days were allowed the freshmen to obtain their proper tam-o'-shanters.

"Three days!" gasped Heavy, as they started off in the little car. "Why, it will take the stores in Greenburg two weeks to supply sufficient tams of the proper color."

"Then if we don't get ours," laughed Ruth, "we'd better go bareheaded until the new tams can be sent us from home."

"I won't do that!" cried the annoyed Helen. "Oh! oh!" she exclaimed, the next moment, and before they were out of the grounds. "See Miss Frayne! She has her scrambled-egg tam on."

"Don't you suppose she has read the notice?" worried Ruth.

"Why hasn't she?"

"Well, she seems to flock together with herself so much. Nobody seems to be chummy with her—yet," Ruth explained.

"Now, old Mother Worry!" exclaimed Helen, "bother about *her,* will you?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Ruth, demurely. "I shall, I suppose."

"Goodness, Ruth!" cried Jennie.

They discovered a rather strange thing when they arrived in Greenburg and entered the first store that dealt in ladies' apparel. Oh, yes, indeed! the proprietor had tam-o'-shanters of just the required shade, baby blue. The friends bought immediately for fear some of the other girls who had come to town would find these and buy the proprietor out.

And then, prone to the usual feminine frailty, they went "window shopping." And in every store seeking trade from the college girls they found the baby blue tam-o'-shanters.

"It's the most astonishing thing!" gasped Helen. "What do you suppose it means? Did you ever see so many caps of one kind and color in all your life?"

"It is amazing," agreed Ruth. Yet she was reflective.

Jennie began to laugh. "Wonder if the seniors are just helping out their friends among the tradespeople? It looks as though the storekeepers had bought a superabundance of baby blue caps and the seniors were putting it up to us to save the stores from bankruptcy."

Ruth, however, thought it must be something other than that. Was it that the storekeepers had been notified by the senior "powers that be" to be ready to supply a sudden large demand for tam-o'-shanters of that particular hue?

At least, one little Hebrew asked the three friends if they had already bought their tam-o'-shanters. "For vy, I haf a whole case of your class colors, ladies, that my poy iss opening."

"What class color?" demanded Helen, grumpily enough.

"Oh, Mees! A peau-ti-ful plue!"

"They're all doing it! They're all doing it!" murmured Jennie, staggering out of the "emporium." "This is going to affect my brain, girls. *Did* the seniors know the storekeepers had the tams in stock, or have the storekeepers been put wise by our elder sisters at Ardmore?"

"What's the odds?" finally laughed Helen, as they got into the waiting car. "We've got *our* tams. I only hope there are enough to go around."

The appearance of more than a score of baby-

blue caps on the campus before evening showed that our trio of freshmen were not the only members of their class who considered it wise to obey the mandate of the lordly seniors, and without question.

The tempest in the teapot, however, continued to rage. Many girls declared they had not come to Ardmore to "be made monkeys of."

"No," May MacGreggor was heard to say. "Some of you were already assisted by nature. But get together, freshies! Can't you read the handwriting on the wall?"

"We can read the typewriting on the billboards," sniffed Helen Cameron. "Don't ask us to strain our eyesight farther."

Perhaps this was really the intention behind the senior order—that the entering girls should become more quickly riveted into a compact body. How the rooms occupied by the more popular freshmen buzzed during the next few days!

Our trio of friends, Ruth, Helen and Jennie, had been in danger of establishing a clique of three, if they had but known it. Now they were forced to extend their borders of acquaintanceship.

As they were three, and were usually seen about the study-room Ruth and Helen had established, it was natural that other girls of their class on that corridor of Dale Hall should flock to them.

They thus became the nucleus at this side of the campus of the freshman class. From discussing the rule of the haughty seniors, the freshmen began to talk of their own organization and the approaching election.

Had Ruth allowed her friends to do so, there would have been started a boom by Helen and Jennie Stone for the girl of the Red Mill for president of the freshman class. This honor Ruth did not desire. There were several girls whom she had noted already among her mates, older than she, and who evidently possessed qualities for the position.

Besides, Ruth Fielding felt that if she became unduly prominent at first at Ardmore, girls like Edith Phelps would consider her a particularly bright target. She told herself again, but this time in private, that fame was not always an asset.

CHAPTER XI

THE ONE REBEL

However much the natural independence of the freshmen balked at the mandate promulgated by the seniors, baby-blue tam-o'-shanters grew more numerous every hour on the Ardmore campus.

The sophomores were evidently filled with glee; the juniors and seniors smiled significantly, but said nothing. The freshmen had been put in their place at once, it was considered. But the attack upon them had made the newcomers eager for an organization of their own.

"If we are going to be bossed this way—and it is disgraceful!—we must be prepared to withstand imposition," Helen announced.

So they began busily settling the matter of the organization of the class and the choosing of its officers. Before these matters were arranged completely, however, there was an incident of note.

The freshmen, as a body, were invited to attend a sophomore "roar." It was to be the first

out-of-door "roar" of the year and occurred right after classes and lectures one afternoon. The two lower classes scamped their gymnasium work to make it a success.

Now, a "roar" at Ardmore was much nicer than it sounds. It was merely an open-air singing festival, and this one was for the purpose of making the freshmen familiar with the popular songs of the college.

Professor Leidenburg, the musical director, himself led the outdoor concert. The sophomores stood in a compact body before the main entrance to the college hall. Massed in the background, and in a half circle, were the freshmen.

The weather had become cool and all the girls wore their tam-o'-shanters. For the first time it was noticeable how pretty the pale blue caps on the freshmen's heads looked. And the new girls likewise noted that most of the tam-o'-shanters worn by their sophomore hostesses were pale yellow.

It was whispered then (and strange none of the freshmen had discovered it before) that the class preceding theirs at Ardmore—the present sophomores—had been forced to wear caps of a distinctive color, too. These pale yellow ones were their old caps, left over from the previous winter

The open-air assemblages of the college were

made more attractive by this scheme of a particular class color in head-wear.

There was a blot in the assembly of the freshmen on this occasion. It was not discovered in the beginning. Soon, however, there was much whispering, and looking about and pointing.

"Do you see *that?*" gasped Jennie, who had been straining her neck and hopping up and down on her toes to see what the other girls were looking at.

"What *are* you rubbering at, Heavy?" demanded Helen, inelegantly.

"Yes; what's all the disturbance?" asked Ruth.

"That girl!" ejaculated the fleshy one.

"What girl now? Any particular girl?"

"She's not very particular, I guess," returned Jennie, "or she wouldn't do it."

"Jennie!" demanded Helen. *"Who* do *what?"*

"That Frayne girl," explained her plump friend.

Rebecca Frayne stood well back in the lines of freshmen. It could not be said that she thrust herself forward, or sought to gain the attention of the crowd. Nevertheless, among the mass of pale blue tam-o'-shanters, her parti-colored one was very prominent.

"Goodness!" gasped Ruth. "Doesn't she know better?"

"Do you suppose she is one of those stubborn girls who just 'won't be driv'?" giggled Helen.

It was no laughing matter. The three days of grace written upon the seniors' order regarding the caps had now passed. There seemed no good reason for one member of the freshman class to refuse to obey the command. Indeed, they had all tacitly agreed to do as they were told—upon this single point, at least.

"There certainly are enough of them left in town so that she can buy one," Jennie Stone said.

"Goodness!" snapped Helen. "If *my* complexion can stand such a silly color, *hers* certainly can."

Before the out-of-doors concert was over, news of this rebellion on the part of a single freshman had run through the crowd like a breath of wind over ripe wheat. It almost broke up the "roar."

As the last verse of the last song was ended and the company began to disperse, the freshmen themselves, and the sophomores as well, stared at Rebecca Frayne in open wonder. She started for her room, which was in Dare Hall on the same corridor as that of the three girls from Briarwood, and Ruth and Helen and Jennie were right behind her.

"That certainly is an awful tam," groaned Jennie. "What do you suppose makes her wear it, anyway? Let alone the trouble——"

She broke off. Miss Dexter, the first senior who had spoken to Ruth and Helen coming over from the railway station on the auto-bus, stopped

the strange girl whose initials were the same as those of the girl of the Red Mill.

"Will you tell me, please, why you are wearing that tam-o'-shanter?" asked Miss Dexter.

Rebecca Frayne's head came up and a spot of vivid red appeared in either of her sallow cheeks.

"Is that *your* business?" she demanded, slowly.

"Do you know that I am a senior?" asked Miss Dexter, levelly.

"I don't care if you are *two* seniors," returned Rebecca Frayne, saucily.

Miss Dexter turned her back upon the freshman and walked promptly away. The listeners were appalled. None of them cared to go forward and speak to Rebecca Frayne.

"Cracky!" gasped Helen. "She's an awful spitfire."

"She's an awful chump!" groaned Jennie. "The seniors won't do a thing to her!"

But nothing came at once of Rebecca's refusal to obey the seniors' command regarding tam-o'-shanters. It was known, however, that the executive committees of both the senior and junior classes met that next night and supposedly took the matter up.

"Oh, no! They don't haze any more at Ardmore," said Jennie, shaking her head. "But just wait!"

CHAPTER XII

RUTH IS NOT SATISFIED

RUTH FIELDING was not at all satisfied. Not that her experiences in these first few weeks of college were not wholly "up to sample," as the slangy Jennie Stone remarked. Ruth was getting personally all out of college life that she could expect.

The mere fact that a little handful of the girls looked at her somewhat askance because of her success as a motion picture writer, did not greatly trouble the girl of the Red Mill. She could wait for them to forget her small "fame" or for them to learn that she was quite as simple and unaffected as any other girl of her age. It was about Rebecca Frayne that Ruth was disturbed in her mind. Here was the case of a student who, Ruth believed, was much misunderstood.

She could not imagine a girl deliberately making trouble for herself. Rebecca Frayne by the expenditure of a couple of dollars in the purchase of a new tam-o'-shanter might have easily overcome this dislike that had been bred not alone in

the minds of the girls of the two upper classes, but among the sophomores and her own classmates as well. The sophomores thought her ridiculous; the freshmen themselves felt that she was bringing upon the whole class unmerited criticism.

Ruth looked deeper. She saw the strange girl walk past her mates unnoticed, scarcely spoken to, indeed, by the freshmen and ignored completely by members of the other classes. And yet, to Ruth's mind, there seemed to be an air about Rebecca Frayne—a look in her eyes, perhaps—that seemed to beg for sympathy.

It was no hardship for Ruth to speak to the girl and try to be friendly with her. But opportunities for this were not frequent.

In the first place Ruth's own time was much occupied with her studies, her own personal friends, Helen and Jennie, and the new scenario on which she worked during every odd hour.

Several times Ruth went to the door of Rebecca's room and knocked. She positively knew the girl was at home, but there had been no answer to her summons and the door was locked.

The situation troubled Ruth. When she was among her classmates, Rebecca seemed nervously anxious to please and eager to be spoken to, although she had little to say. Here, on the other

hand, once alone in her room, she deliberately shut herself away from all society.

Soon after the outdoor song festival that had been so successful, and immediately following the organization of the freshman class and its election of officers, Ruth and Helen went over to the library one evening to consult some reference books.

The reference room was well filled with busy girls of all classes, who came bustling in, got down the books they required, dipped into them for a minute and then departed to their own studies, or else settled down to work on their topics for a more extended period.

It was a cold evening, and whenever a girl entered from the hall a breath of frosty air came with her, and most of those gathered in the room were likely to look up and shiver. Few of those assembled failed to notice Rebecca Frayne when she came in.

"Goodness! See who has came," whispered Helen.

"Oh, Rebecca!" murmured Ruth, looking up as the girl in question crossed the room.

"Hasn't she the cheek of all cheeks to breeze in here this way?" Helen went on to say with more force than elegance. "That awful tam again."

One could not fail to see the tam-o'-shanter very well. It was noticeable in any assembly.

Perhaps half of the girls in the reference room were seniors and juniors. Several of the members of the younger classes nodded to the newcomer, though not many noticed her in this way.

There was, however, almost immediately a general movement by the girls belonging to the senior and junior classes. They got up grimly, put away the books they were at work upon, and filed out, one by one, and without saying a word.

Helen stared after them, and nudged Ruth.

"What is it?" asked her chum, who had been too busy to notice.

"Did you see that?" asked Helen.

"Did I see what?"

"There isn't a senior or a jun left in the room. That—that's something more than a coincidence."

Ruth was puzzled. "I really wish you would explain," she said.

Helen was not the only girl remaining who had noticed the immediate departure of the members of the two older classes. Some of the sophomores were whispering together. Rebecca's fellow-classmen glanced at her sharply to see if she had noticed what had occurred.

"I can't believe it," Ruth said worriedly, after Helen explained. "They would not go out because she came in."

The next day, however, the matter was more marked. Rebecca could sing; she evidently loved

singing. In the classes for vocal music there was often a mixture of all grades, some of the seniors and juniors attending with the sophomores and freshmen.

Ruth Fielding, of course, never missed these classes. She hoped to be noticed and have her voice tried out for the Glee Club. Professor Leidenburg was to give a little talk on this day that would be helpful, and the class was well attended.

But when Rebecca Frayne came into the small hall just before the professor himself appeared, there was a stir throughout the audience. The girls, of course, were hatless here; but that morning Rebecca had been seen wearing the "scrambled-egg tam," as Helen insisted upon calling it.

There was an intake of breath all over the room. Rebecca walked down the aisle in search of an empty seat.

And suddenly half the seats were empty. She could have her choice—and a large one.

"Goodness!" Helen gasped.

Every senior and junior in the room had arisen and had left her seat. Not a word had been spoken, nor had they glanced at Rebecca Frayne, who at first was unaware of what it portended.

The older girls filed out silently. Professor Leidenburg entered by the door beside the organ just in time to see the last of them disappear. He

looked a bit surprised, but said nothing and took up the matter at hand with but half an audience.

Rebecca Frayne had seen and understood at last. She sat still in her seat, and Ruth saw that she did not open her lips when, later, the choruses were sung. Her face was very pale.

Nobody spoke to her when the class was dismissed. This was not an intentional slight on the part of her mates; simply, the girls did not know what to say.

The seniors and juniors were showing Rebecca that she was taboo. Their attitude could not be mistaken. And so great was the influence of these older girls of Ardmore upon the whole college that Rebecca walked entirely alone.

Ruth and Helen walked down the hill behind Rebecca that afternoon. Ruth was very silent, while Helen buzzed about a dozen things.

"I—I wonder how that poor girl feels?" murmured the girl of the Red Mill after a while.

"Cold, I imagine!" declared her chum, vigorously. "I'm half frozen myself, Ruth. There's going to be a big frost to-night and the lake is already skimmed over. Say, Ruth!"

"Well?" asked her friend, absently.

"Let's take our skates first thing in the morning down to that man who sharpens things at the boathouse; will you?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE GIRL IN THE STORM

RUTH FIELDING was quite as eager for fun between lessons as either Helen or Jennie, and the prospect of skating on such a large lake as Remona delighted her. The second day following the incident in the chorus class, the ice which had bound Lake Remona was officially pronounced safe.

Gymnasium athletics lost their charm for those girls who were truly active and could skate. There were luxurious damsels who preferred to be pushed about in ice-chairs by more active girls or by hired attendants; but our trio of friends did not look upon that as enjoyment.

Even Jennie Stone was a vigorous skater. After a day or two on the ice, when their ankles had become strong enough, the three made a circuit of Bliss Island—and that was "some skate," to quote Jennie.

The island was more than a mile from the boathouse, and it was five or six miles in circumfer-

ence. Therefore, the task was quite all of an eight-mile jaunt.

"But 'do or die' is our motto," remarked Helen, as they set forth on this determined journey. "Let's show these pussy girls what it means to have trained at Briarwood."

"That's all right! that's all right!" grumbled Jennie. "But your motto is altogether too grim and significant. Let's limit it. I want to *do* if I can; but mercy me! I don't want to *die* yet. You girls have got to stop and rest when I say so, or I won't go at all."

Ruth and Helen agreed. That is why it took them until almost dinner-time to encircle the island. Jennie Stone was determined to rest upon the least provocation.

"We'll be starved to death before we get back," Helen began to complain while they were upon the south side of the island. "I should think you would feel the pinch of privation, Heavy."

"I do," admitted the other hollowly.

"Well, why didn't you escape it by refusing to come, or else by bringing a lunch?" demanded the black-eyed girl.

"No. This is a part of the system," groaned Jennie.

"What system, I'd like to know?" Ruth asked, in surprise.

"System of martyrdom, I guess," sniffed Helen.

"You've said it," agreed the plump girl. "That is the truest word yet spoken. Martyrdom! that is what it means for me."

"What means to you?" snapped Helen, exasperated because she could not understand.

"This dieting and exercising," Jennie said more cheerfully. "I deliberately came so far and without food to see if I couldn't really lose some weight. Do you know, girls, I am so hollow and so tired right now, that I believe I must have lost a few ounces, anyway."

"You ridiculous thing!" laughed Helen, recovering her good nature.

"Should we sacrifice ourselves for your benefit, do you think, Jennie?" Ruth asked.

"Why not? 'Love thy neighbor as thyself,' only more so. I need the inspiration of you girls to help me," Jennie declared. "Do you know, sometimes I am almost discouraged?"

"About what?" asked Helen.

"About my weight. I watch the bathroom scales with eagle eye. But instead of coming down by pounds, I only fall by ounces. It is awfully discouraging. And then," added the fleshy girl, "the other day when we had such a scrumptuous dinner—was it Columbus Day? I believe so—I was tempted to eat one of my old-time 'full and plenty' meals, and what do you think?"

"You had the nightmare," said Helen.

"Not a chance! But I went up *two pounds and a half*—or else the scales were crazy!"

"Girls!" exclaimed Ruth, suddenly. "Do you know it is snowing?"

"My! I never expected that," cried Helen, as a feathery flake lit upon the very point of her pretty nose. "Ow!"

"Well, we'd better go on, I guess," Ruth observed. "Put your best foot forward, please, Miss Jennie."

"I don't know which is my best foot now," complained the heavy girl. "They are both getting lame."

"We'll just have to make you sit down on the ice while we drag you," announced Helen, increasing the length of her stroke.

"Not much you won't!" exclaimed Jennie Stone. "I'm cold enough as it is."

"Shall we take off our skates and walk over the island, girls?" suggested Ruth. "That will save some time and more than a little work for Heavy."

"Don't worry about me," put in Jennie. "I need the exercise. And walking would be worse than skating, I do believe."

It was snowing quite thickly now; but the shore of the island was not far away. The trio hugged it closely in encircling the wooded and hilly piece of land.

"Say!" Helen cried, "we're not the only girls out here to-day."

"Huh?" grunted Jennie, head down and skating doggedly.

"See there, Ruth!" called the black-eyed girl.

Ruth turned her face to one side and looked under the shade of her hand, which she held above her eyes. There was a figure moving along the shore of Bliss Island just abreast of them.

"It's a girl," she said. "But she's not skating."

"Who is it? A freshie?" asked Jennie, but little interested.

Ruth did not reply. She seemed wonderfully interested by the appearance of the girl on shore. She fell behind her mates while she watched the figure.

The snow was increasing; and that with the abruptly rising island, furnished a background for the strange girl which threw her into relief.

At first Ruth was attracted only by her figure. She could not see her face.

"Who can she be? Not one of the girls at Dare Hall——"

This idea spun to nothingness very quickly. No! The figure ashore reminded Ruth Fielding of nobody whom she had seen recently. The feeling, however, that she knew the person grew.

The snow blew sharply into the faces of the skating girls; but she on shore was somewhat shel-

tered from the gale. The wind was out of the north and west and the highland of the island broke the zest of the gale for the strange girl.

"And yet she isn't strange—I *know* she isn't," murmured Ruth Fielding, casting another glance back at the figure on the shore.

"Come on, Ruth! *Do* hurry!" cried Helen, looking back. "Even Heavy is beating you."

Ruth quickened her efforts. The strange girl disappeared, mounting a path it seemed toward the center of the island. Ruth, head bent and lips tightly closed, skated on intent upon her mystifying thoughts.

The trio rounded the island at last. They got the wind somewhat at their backs and on a long slant made for the boathouse landing. It was growing dusk, but there was a fire at the landing that beckoned them on.

"Glad it isn't any farther," Helen panted. "This snow is gathering so fast it clogs one's skates."

"Oh, I must be losing pounds!" puffed Jennie Stone. "I bet none of my clothes will fit me tomorrow. I shall have to throw them all away."

"Oh, Heavy!" giggled Helen. "That lovely new silk?"

"Oh—well—I shall take *that* in!" drawled Jennie.

"I've got it!" exclaimed Ruth, in a most startling way.

"Goodness me! are you hurt?" demanded Helen.

"What you got? A cramp?" asked Jennie, quite as solicitous.

"I know now who that girl looked like," declared Ruth.

"What girl?" rejoined Helen Cameron. "The one over yonder, on the other side of the island?"

"Yes. She looks just like that Maggie who came to the mill, Helen. You remember, don't you? The girl I left to help Aunt Alvirah when I came to college."

"Well, for the land's sake!" said Jennie Stone. "If she's up there at the Red Mill, how can she possibly be down here, too? You're talking out of order, Miss Fielding. Sit down!"

CHAPTER XIV

"OFT IN THE STILLY NIGHT"

RUTH FIELDING could not get that surprising, that almost unbelievable, discovery out of her mind.

It seemed ridiculous to think that girl could be Maggie, "the waif," she had seen on Bliss Island. Aunt Alvirah had written Ruth a letter only a few days before and in it she said that Maggie was very helpful and seemed wholly content.

"Only," the little old housekeeper at the Red Mill wrote, "I don't know a mite more about the child now than I did when Mr. Tom Cameron and our Ben brought her in, all white and fainty-like."

The girls had to hurry on or be late to dinner. But the very first thing Ruth did when she reached their rooms in Dare Hall was to look up Aunt Alvirah's letter and see when it was dated and mailed.

"It's obvious," Ruth told herself, "that Maggie could have reached here almost as soon as the letter if she had wished to. But why come at

all? If it was Maggie over on that island, why was she there?"

Of course, these ruminations were all in private. Ruth knew better than to take her two close friends into her confidence. If she did the mystery would have been the chief topic of conversation after dinner, instead of the studies slated for that evening.

An incident occurred, however, at dinner which served to take Ruth's mind, too, from the mystery. There were a number of seniors and juniors quartered at Dare Hall. Nor were all the seniors table-captains at dinner.

This evening the dining hall had filled early. Perhaps the brisk air and their outdoor exercise had given the girls sharper appetites than usual. It had the three girls from Briarwood. They were wearied after their long skate around the island and as ravenous as wolves. They could scarcely wait for Miss Comstock, at the head of their particular table, to begin eating so they might do so, too.

And just at this moment, as the pleasant bustle of dinner began, and the lightly tripping waitresses were stepping hither and yon with their trays, the door opened and a single belated girl entered the dining hall.

As though the entrance of this girl were expected, a hush fell over the room. Everybody

but Jennie looked up, their soup spoons poised as they watched Rebecca Frayne walk down the long room to her place at the housekeeper's table.

"Sh!" hissed Helen, admonishing Jennie Stone.

"What's the matter?" demanded the fleshy girl in surprise. "Is my soup noisy? I'll have to train it better."

But nobody laughed. All eyes were fastened on the girl who had made herself so obnoxious to the seniors and the juniors of Ardmore. She sat down and a waitress put her soup before her. Before poor Rebecca could lift her spoon there was a stir all over the room. Every senior and junior (and there were more than half a hundred in the dining hall) arose, save those acting as table-captains or monitors. The rustle of their rising was subdued; they murmured their excuses to the heads of their several tables in a perfectly polite manner; and not a glance from their eyes turned toward Rebecca Frayne. But as they walked out of the dining hall, their dinners scarcely tasted, the slight put upon the freshman who would not obey was too direct and obvious to be mistaken.

Even Jennie Stone was at length aroused from her enjoyment of the very good soup.

"What do you know about *that?*" she demanded of Ruth and Helen.

Ruth said not a word. To tell the truth she felt so sorry for Rebecca Frayne that she lost

taste for her own meal, hungry though she had been when she sat down.

How Rebecca herself felt could only be imagined. She had already shown herself to be a painful mixture of sensitiveness and carelessness of criticism that made Ruth Fielding, at least, wonder greatly.

Now she ate her dinner without seeming to observe the attitude the members of the older classes had taken.

"Cracky!" murmured Jennie, in the middle of dinner. "She's got all the best of it—believe me! The seniors and the juns go hungry."

"For a principle," snapped the girl beside her, who chanced to be a sophomore.

"Well," said Jennie, smiling, "principles are far from filling. They're a good deal like the only part of the doughnut that agreed with the dyspeptic—the hole. Please pass the bread, dear. Somebody must have eaten mine—and it was nicely buttered, too."

"Goodness! nothing disturbs your calm, does it, Miss Stone?" cried another girl.

Few of the girls in the dining hall, however, could keep their minds or their gaze off Rebecca Frayne. In whispers all through the meal she was discussed by her close neighbors. Girls at tables farther away talked of the situation frankly.

And the concensus of opinion was against her. It was the general feeling that she was entirely in the wrong. The very law which she had essayed to flaunt was that which had brought the freshmen together as a class, and was welding them into a homogeneous whole.

"She's a goose!" exclaimed Helen Cameron.

And perhaps this was true. It did look foolish. Yet Ruth felt that there must be some misunderstanding back of it all. It should be explained. The girl could not go on in this way.

"First we know she'll be packing up and leaving Ardmore," Ruth said worriedly.

"She'll leave nobody in tears, I guess," declared one girl within hearing.

"But she's one of us—she's a freshman!" Ruth murmured.

"She doesn't seem to desire our company or friendship," said another and more thoughtful girl.

"And she won't pack up in a hurry," drawled Jennie, still eating. "Remember all those bags and that enormous trunk she brought?"

"But, say," began Helen, slowly, "where are all the frocks and things she was supposed to bring with her? We supposed she'd be the peacock of the class, and I don't believe I've seen her in more than three different dresses and only two hats, including that indescribably brilliant tam."

Ruth said nothing. She was thinking. She planned to get out of the dining hall at the same time Rebecca did, but just as the dessert was being passed the odd girl rose quickly, bowed her excuses to the housekeeper, and almost ran out of the hall.

"She was crying!" gasped Ruth, feeling both helpless and sympathetic.

"I wager she bit her tongue, then," remarked Jennie.

Ruth hurried through her dessert and left the dining hall ahead of most of the girls. She glanced through the long windows and saw that it was still snowing.

"I wonder if that girl is over on the island yet?" she reflected as she ran upstairs.

Her first thought just then was of an entirely different girl. She went to Rebecca's door and knocked. She knocked twice, then again. But no answer was returned. No light came through the keyhole, or from under the door; yet Ruth felt sure that Rebecca Frayne was in the room, and weeping. It was a situation in which Ruth Fielding longed to help, yet there seemed positively nothing she could do as long as the stubborn girl would not meet her half way. With a sigh she went to the study she and Helen jointly occupied.

Before switching on the light she went to one of the windows that looked out on the lake. Bliss

Island was easily visible from this point. The snow was still falling, but not heavily enough to obstruct her vision much. The white bulk of the island rose in the midst of the field of snow-covered ice. It seemed nearer than it ordinarily appeared.

As Ruth gazed she saw a spark of light on the island, high up from the shore, but evidently among the trees, for it was intermittent. Now it was visible and again only a red glow showed there. She was still gazing upon this puzzling light when Helen opened the door.

"Hello, Ruthie!" she cried. "All in the dark? Oh! isn't the outside world beautiful to-night?"

She came to the window and put her arm about Ruth's waist.

"See how solemnly the snow is falling—and the whole world is white," murmured the black-eyed girl. " 'Oft in the stilly night'—— Or is it 'Oft in the silly night'?" and she laughed, for it was not often nor for long that the sentiment that lay deep in Helen's heart rose to the surface. "Oh! What's that light over there, Ruth?" she added, with quick apprehension.

"That is what I have been looking at," Ruth said.

"But you don't tell me what it is!" cried Helen.

"Because I don't know. But I suspect."

"Suspect what?"

"That it is a campfire," said Ruth. "Yes. It seems to be in one spot. Only the wind makes the flames leap, and at one time they are plainly visible while again they are partly obscured."

"Who ever would camp over on Bliss Island on a night like this?" gasped Helen.

"I don't see why you put such mysteries up to me," returned Ruth, with a shrug. "I'm no prophet. But——"

"But what?"

"Do you remember that girl we saw on the island this afternoon?"

"Goodness! Yes."

"Well, mightn't it be she, or a party she may be with?"

"Campers on the island in a snow storm? No girls from this college would be so silly," Helen declared.

"I'm not at all sure she was an Ardmore girl," said Ruth, reflectively.

"Who under the sun could she be, then?"

"Almost anybody else," laughed Ruth. "It is going to stop snowing altogether soon, Helen. See! the moon is breaking through the clouds."

"It will be lovely out," sighed Helen. "But hard walking."

Ruth gestured towards their two pairs of snowshoes crossed upon the wall. "Not on those," she said.

"Oh, Ruthie! Would you?"

"All we have to do is to tighten them and sally forth."

"Gracious! I'd be willing to be Sally Fifth for a spark of fun," declared Helen, eagerly.

"How about Heavy?" asked Ruth, as Helen hastened to take down the snowshoes which both girls had learned to use years before at Snow Camp, in the Adirondacks.

"Dead to the world already, I imagine," laughed Helen. "I saw her to her room, and I believe she was so tired and so full of dinner that she tumbled into bed almost before she got her clothes off. You'd never get her out on such a crazy venture!"

Helen was as happy as a lark over the chance of "fun." The two girls skilfully tightened the stringing of the shoes, and then, having put on coats, mittens, and drawn the tam-o'-shanters down over their ears, they crept out of their rooms and hastened downstairs and out of the dormitory building.

There was not a moving object in sight upon the campus or the sloping white lawns to the level of the frozen lake. The two chums thrust their toes into the straps of their snowshoes and set forth.

CHAPTER XV

AN ODD ADVENTURE

Six inches or more of snow had fallen. It was feathery and packed well under the snowshoes. The girls sank about two inches into the fleecy mass and there the shoes made a complete bed for themselves and the weight of their wearers.

"You know what I'd love to do this winter?" said Helen, as they trudged on.

"What, my dear?" asked Ruth, who seemed much distraught.

"I'd like to try skiing. The slope of College Hill would be just splendiferous for *that!* Away from the observatory to the lake—and then some!"

"We'll start a skiing club among the freshies," Ruth said, warmly accepting the idea. "Wonder nobody has thought of it before."

"Ardmore hasn't waked up yet to all its possibilities," said Helen, demurely. "But this umpty-umph class of freshmen will show the college a thing or two before we pass from out its scholastic halls."

"Question!" cried Ruth, laughing. Then: "There! you can see that light again."

"Goodness! You're never going over to that island?" cried Helen.

"What did we come out for?" asked Ruth. "And scamp our study hour?"

"Goodness!" cried Helen, again, "just for *fun*."

"Well, it may be fun to find out just who built that fire and what for," said Ruth.

"And then again," objected her chum, "it may be no fun at all, but *serious*."

"I have a serious reason for finding out—if I can," Ruth declared.

"What is it, dear?"

"I'll tell you later," said Ruth. "Follow me now."

"If I do I'll not wear diamonds, and I may get into trouble," objected Helen.

"You've never got into very serious trouble yet by following my leadership," laughed Ruth. "Come on, Fraid-cat."

"Ain't! But we don't know who is over there. Just to think! A camp in the snow!"

"Well, we have camped in the snow ourselves," laughed Ruth, harking back to an adventure at Snow Camp that neither of them would ever be likely to forget.

They scuffed along on the snowshoes, soon reaching the edge of the lake. Nobody was about

the boathouse, for the ice would have to be swept and scraped by the horse-drawn machines before the girls could go skating again.

The moon was pushing through the scurrying clouds, and the snow had ceased falling.

"Look back!" crowed Helen. "Looks as though two enormous animals had come down the hillside, doesn't it?"

"The girls will wake up and view our tracks with wonder in the morning," said Ruth, with a smile. "Perhaps they'll think that some curious monsters have visited Ardmore."

"That would cause more wonderment than the case of Rebecca Frayne. What do you suppose is finally going to happen to that foolish girl?"

"I really cannot guess," Ruth returned, shaking her head sadly. "Poor thing!"

"Why! she can't be *poor*," gasped Helen. "Look at all those trunks she brought with her to Ardmore. And her dresses are tremendously fancy—although we've not seen many of them yet."

Ruth stared at her chum for a moment without replying. It was right there and then that she came near to guessing the secret of Rebecca Frayne's trouble. But she forbore to say anything about it at the time, and went on beside her chum toward the white island, much disturbed in her mind.

Now and then they caught sight of the dancing flames of the campfire. But when they were nearer the island, the hill was so steep that they lost sight completely of the light.

"Suppose it's a *man?*" breathed Helen, suddenly, as they began to climb the shore of Bliss Island.

"He won't eat us," returned Ruth.

"No. They don't often. Only cannibals, and they are not prevalent in this locality," giggled Helen. "But if it *is* a man——"

"Then we'll turn around and go back," said Ruth, coolly. "I haven't come out here to get acquainted with any male person."

"Bluie! Suppose he's a real nice boy?"

"There's no such an animal," laughed Ruth. "That is, not around here at the present moment."

"Oh yes. I see," Helen rejoined drily. "The nearest *nice* one is at the Seven Oaks Military Academy."

"So you say," Ruth said demurely. "But if it were Tom?"

"Dear old Tom and some of his chums!" cried Helen. "Wouldn't it be great? This Adamless Eden is rather palling on me, Chum. The other girls have visitors, but our friends are too far away."

"Hush!" advised Ruth. "Whoever it is up there will hear you."

Helen was evidently not at all enamored of this adventure. She lagged behind a little. Yet she would not allow Ruth to go on alone to interview the mysterious camper.

"I tell you what," the black-eyed girl said, after a moment and in a whisper. "I believe that fire is up near the big boulder we looked at—you remember? The Stone Face, do they call it?"

"Quite possibly," Ruth rejoined briskly. "Come on if you're coming. I'm sure the Stone Face won't hurt us."

"Not unless it falls on us," giggled Helen.

The grove of big trees that covered this part of the hillside was open, and the chums very easily made their way toward the fire, even on snowshoes. But the shoes naturally made some noise as they scuffed over the snow, and in a minute Ruth stopped and slipped her feet out of the straps, motioning Helen to do the same. They wore overshoes so there was no danger of their getting their feet wet in the snow.

Hand in hand, Ruth and Helen crept forward. They saw the fire flickering just before them. There was a single figure between the fire and the very boulder of which Helen had spoken.

Reaching the edge of the grove the girls gazed without discovery at the camp in the snow. The boulder stood in a small open space, and it was so high and bulky that it sheltered the fire and the

camper quite comfortably. As Ruth had suspected, the latter was the girl she had seen walking upon the southern shore of Bliss Island. She knew her by her figure, if not by her face, which was at the moment hidden.

"She's alone," whispered Helen, making the words with her lips more than with her voice.

"What *can* she be doing out here?" was the black-eyed girl's next demand.

Her chum put out a hand in a gesture of warning and at once walked out of the shelter of the trees and approached the fire. Helen lingered behind. After all, it was so strange a situation that she did not feel very courageous.

The moon had quite broken through the clouds now and as Ruth drew nearer to the fire and the girl, her shadow was projected before her upon the snow. The girl who looked like Maggie suddenly espied this shadow, raised her head, and leaped up with a cry.

"Don't be frightened, Maggie," said Ruth. "It's only us two girls."

"My—my name is—isn't Maggie," stammered the strange girl.

And sure enough, having once seen her closely, Ruth Fielding saw that she was quite wrong in her identification. This was not the girl who had drifted down the Lumano River to the Red Mill and taken refuge with Aunt Alvirah.

This was a much more assertive person than Maggie—a girl with plenty of health, both of body and mind. Maggie impressed one as being mentally or nervously deficient. Not so this girl who was camping here in the snow on Bliss Island. Yet there was a resemblance to Maggie in the figure of the stranger, and Ruth noted a resemblance in her features, too.

"My goodness me!" she said, laughing pleasantly. "If you're not our Maggie you look near enough like her to be her sister."

"Well, I haven't any sister in that college," said the strange girl, shortly. "You're from Ardmore, aren't you?"

"Yes," Ruth said, Helen now having joined them. "And we saw your light——"

"My *what?*" demanded the camping girl, who was warmly, though plainly dressed.

"Your campfire. You see," explained Ruth, finding it rather difficult after all to talk to this very self-possessed girl, "we skated around the island to-day——"

"I saw you," said the stranger gruffly. "There were three of you."

"Yes. And I thought you looked like Maggie, then."

"Isn't this Maggie one of you?" sharply demanded the stranger.

"She's a girl whom—whom I know," Ruth said

quickly. "A really nice girl. And you do look like her. Doesn't she, Helen?"

"Why—yes—something like," drawled Helen.

"And did you have to come out here to see if I were your friend?" asked the other girl.

"When I saw the campfire—yes," Ruth admitted. "It seemed so strange, you know."

"What seemed strange?" demanded the girl, very tartly. It was plain that she considered their visit an intrusion.

"Why, think of it yourself," Ruth cried, while Helen sniffed audibly. "A girl camping alone on this island—and in a snowstorm."

"It isn't snowing now," said the girl, smiling grimly.

"But it was when we saw the fire at first," Ruth hastened to say. "You know yourself you would be interested."

"Not enough to come clear out here—must be over a mile!—to see about it," was the rejoinder. "I usually mind my own business."

"So do we, you may be sure!" spoke up Helen, quick to take offence. "Come away, Ruth."

But the girl of the Red Mill was not at all satisfied. She said, frankly:

"I do wish that you would tell us why you are here? Surely, you won't remain all night in this lonely place? There is nobody else on the island, is there?"

"I should hope not!" exclaimed the girl. "Only you two busybodies."

"But, really, we came because we were interested in what went on here. It seems so strange for a girl, alone——"

"You've said that before," was the dry reply. "I am a girl alone. I am here on my own business. And *that* isn't yours."

"Oh!" ejaculated Helen, angrily.

"Well, if you don't like being spoken to plainly, you needn't stay," the strange girl flung at her.

"I see that very well," returned Helen, tossing her head. "*Do* come away, Ruth."

"Ha!" exclaimed the strange girl, suddenly looking at Ruth more intently. "Are you called Ruth?"

"Yes. Ruth Fielding is my name."

"Oh!" and the girl's face changed in its expression and a little flush came into her cheeks. "I've —I've heard of you."

"Indeed! How?" cried Ruth, eagerly. She felt that this girl must really have some connection with Maggie at the mill, she looked so much like the waif.

"Oh," said the other girl slowly, looking away, "I heard you wrote picture plays. I saw one of them. That's all."

Ruth was silent for a moment. Helen kept tugging at her arm and urging her to go.

"We—we can do nothing for you?" queried the girl of the Red Mill at last.

"You can get off the island—that's as much as I care," said the strange girl, with a harsh laugh. "You're only intruding where you're not wanted."

"Well, I do declare!" burst out Helen again. "She is the most impolite thing. *Do* come away, Ruthie."

"We really came with the best intentions," Ruth added, as she turned away with her chum. "It—it doesn't look right for a girl to be alone at a campfire on this island—and at night, too."

"I sha'n't stay here all night," the girl said shortly. "You needn't fret. If you want to know, I just built the fire to get warm by before I started back."

"Back where?" Ruth could not help asking.

"*That* you don't know—and you won't know," returned the strange girl, and turned her back upon them.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT WAS IN REBECCA'S TRUNK

THE two chums did not speak a word to each other until they had recovered their snowshoes and set out down the rough side of Bliss Island for the ice. Then Helen sputtered:

"People like *that!* Did you ever see such a person? I never was so insulted——"

"Pshaw! She was right—in a way," Ruth said coolly. "We had no real business to pry into her affairs."

"Well!"

"I got you into it. I'm sorry," the girl of the Red Mill said. "I thought it really was Maggie, or I wouldn't have come over here."

"She's something like that Maggie girl," proclaimed Helen. *"She* was nice, I thought."

"Maybe this girl is nice, taken under other circumstances," laughed Ruth. "I really would like to know what she is over here for."

"No good, I'll be bound," said the pessimistic Helen.

"And another thing," Ruth went on to say, as

she and her chum reached the level of the frozen lake, "did you notice that pick handle?"

"That what?" demanded Helen, in amazement.

"Pickaxe handle—I believe it was," Ruth said thoughtfully. "It was thrust out of the snow pile she had scraped away from the boulder. And, moreover, the ground looked as though it had been dug into."

"Why, the ground is as hard as the rock itself," Helen cried. "There are six or eight inches of frost right now."

"I guess that's so," agreed Ruth. "Perhaps that's why she built such a big fire."

"What *do* you mean, Ruth Fielding?" cried her chum.

"I think she wanted to dig there for something," Ruth replied reflectively. "I wonder what for?"

When they had returned to Dare Hall and had got their things off and were warm again, they looked out of the window. The campfire on the island had died out.

"She's gone away, of course," sighed Ruth. "But I would like to know what she was there for."

"One of the mysteries of life," said Helen, as she made ready for bed. "Dear me, but I'm tired!"

She was asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow. Not so Ruth. The latter lay awake some time wondering about the odd girl on the island and her errand there.

Ruth Fielding had another girl's troubles on her mind, however—and a girl much closer to her. The girl on the island merely teased her imagination. Rebecca Frayne's difficulties seemed much more important to Ruth.

Of course, there was no real reason for Ruth to take up cudgels for her odd classmate. Indeed, she did not feel that she could do that, for she was quite convinced that Rebecca Frayne was wrong. Nevertheless, she was very sorry for the girl. The trouble over the tam-o'-shanter had become the most talked-of incident of the school term. For the several following days Rebecca was scarcely seen outside her room, save in going to and from her classes.

She did not again appear in the dining hall. How she arranged about meals Ruth and her friends could not imagine. Then the housekeeper admitted to Ruth that she had allowed the lonely girl to get her own little meals in her room, as she had cooking utensils and an alcohol lamp.

"It is not usually allowed, I know. But Miss Frayne seems to have come to college prepared to live in just that way. She is a small eater, anyway. And—well, anything to avoid friction."

"Of course," Ruth said to Helen and Jennie Stone, "lots of girls live in furnished rooms and get their own meals—working girls and students. But it is not a system generally allowed at college, and at Ardmore especially. We shall hear from the faculty about it before the matter is done with."

"Well, we're not doing it," scoffed Jennie. "And that Rebecca Frayne is behaving like a chump."

"But how she does stick to that awful tam!" groaned Helen.

"Stubborn as a mule," agreed Jennie.

"I saw her with another hat on to-day," said Ruth, reflectively.

"That's so! It was the one she wore the day she arrived," Helen said quickly. "A summer hat. I wonder what she did bring in that trunk, anyway? She has displayed no such charming array of finery as I expected."

Ruth did not discuss this point. She was more interested in the state of Rebecca's mind, though, of course, there was not much time for her to give to anything but her studies and regular duties now, for as the term advanced the freshmen found their hours pretty well filled.

Scrub teams for certain indoor sports had been made up, and even Jennie Stone took up the playing of basketball with vigor. She was really

losing flesh. She kept a card tacked upon her door on which she set down the fluctuations of her bodily changes daily. When she lost a whole pound in weight she wrote it down in red ink.

Their activities kept the three friends well occupied, both physically and mentally. Yet Ruth Fielding could not feel wholly satisfied or content when she knew that one of her mates was in trouble. She had taken an interest in Rebecca Frayne at the beginning of the semester; yet of all the freshmen Rebecca was the one whom she knew the least.

"And that poor girl needs somebody for a friend—I feel it!" Ruth told herself. "Of course, she is to blame for the situation in which she now is. But for that very reason she ought to have somebody with whom to talk it over."

Ruth determined to be that confidant of the girl who seemed to wish no associate and no confidant. She began to loiter in the corridors between recitation hours and at odd times. Whenever she knocked on Rebecca's door there was no reply. Other girls who had tried it quickly gave up their sympathetic attentions. If the foolish girl wished for no friends, let her go her own way. That became the attitude of the freshman class. Of course, the sophomores followed the lead of the seniors and the juniors, having as little to do with the unfortunate girl as possible.

But the day and hour came at last when Ruth chanced to be right at hand when Rebecca Frayne came in and unlocked her room door. Her arms were full of small packages. Ruth knew that she had walked all the way to the grocery store on the edge of Greenburg, which the college girls often patronized.

It had been a long, cold walk, and Rebecca's fingers were numb. She dropped a paper bag—and it contained eggs!

Now, it is quite impossible to hide the fact of a dropped egg. At another time Ruth might have laughed; but now she soberly retrieved the paper bag before the broken eggs could do much damage, and stepped into the room after the nervous Rebecca.

"Oh, thank you!" gasped the girl. "Put—put them down anywhere. Thank you!"

"My goodness!" said Ruth, laughing, "you can't put broken eggs down *anywhere*. Don't you see they are runny?"

"Never mind, Miss Fielding——"

"Oh! you've a regular kitchenette here, haven't you?" said Ruth, emboldened to look behind a curtain. "How cunning. I'll put these eggs in this clean dish. Mercy, but they are scrambled!"

"Don't trouble, Miss Fielding. You are very kind."

"But scrambled eggs are pretty good, at that,"

Ruth went on, unheeding the other girl's nervousness. "If you can only get the broken shells out of them," and she began coolly to do this with a fork. "I should think you would not like eating alone, Rebecca."

The other girl stared at her. "How can I help it?" she asked harshly.

"Just by getting a proper tam and stop being stubborn," Ruth told her.

"Miss Fielding!" cried Rebecca, her face flushing. "Do you think I do this for—for fun?"

"You must. It isn't a disease, is it?" and Ruth laughed aloud, determined to refuse to take the other's tragic words seriously.

"You—you are unbearable!" gasped Rebecca.

"No, I'm not. I want to be your friend," Ruth declared boldly. "I want you to have other friends, too. No use flocking by one's self at college. Why, my dear girl! you are missing all that is best in college life."

"I'd like to know what *is* best in college life!" burst out Rebecca Frayne, sullenly.

"Friendship. Companionship. The rubbing of one mind against another," Ruth said promptly.

"Pooh!" returned the startled Rebecca. "I wouldn't want to rub my mind against some of these girls' minds. All I ever hear them talk about is dress or amusements."

"I don't think you know many of the other girls

well enough to judge the calibre of their minds," said Ruth, gently.

"And why don't I?" demanded Rebecca, still with a sort of suppressed fury.

"We all judge more or less by appearances," Ruth admitted slowly. "I presume *you,* too, were judged that way."

"What do you mean, Miss Fielding?" asked Rebecca, more mildly.

"When you came here to Ardmore you made a first impression. We all do," Ruth said.

"Yes," Rebecca admitted, with a slight curl of her lip. She was naturally a proud-looking girl, and she seemed actually haughty now. "I was mistaken for *you,* I believe."

Ruth laughed heartily at that.

"I should be a good friend of yours," she said. "It was a great sell on those sophomores. They had determined to make poor little me suffer for some small notoriety I had gained at boarding school."

"I never went to boarding school," snapped Rebecca. "I never was *anywhere* till I came to college. Just to our local schools. I worked hard, let me tell you, to pass the examinations to get in here."

"And why don't you let your mind broaden and get the best there is to be had at Ardmore?" Ruth demanded, quickly. "The girls misunderstand

you. I can see that. We freshmen have got to bow our heads to the will of the upper classes. It doesn't hurt—much," and she laughed again.

"Do you think I am wearing this old tam because I am stubborn?" demanded the other girl, again with that fierceness that seemed so strange in one so young.

"Why—aren't you?"

"No."

"Why do you wear it, then?" asked Ruth, wonderingly.

"Because I cannot afford to buy another!"

Rebecca Frayne said this in so tense a voice that Ruth was fairly staggered. The girl of the Red Mill gazed upon the other's flaming face for a full minute without making any reply. Then, faintly, she said:

"I—I didn't understand, Rebecca. We none of us do, I guess. You came here in such style! That heavy trunk and those bags——"

"All out of our attic," said the other, sharply. "Did you think them filled with frocks and furbelows? See here!"

Ruth had already noticed the packages of papers piled along one wall of the room. Rebecca pointed to them.

"Out of our attic, too," she said, with a scornful laugh that was really no laugh at all. "Old papers that have lain there since the Civil War."

"But, Rebecca——"

"Why did I do it?" put in the other, in the same hard voice. "Because I was a little fool. Because I did not understand.

"I didn't know just what college was like. I never talked with a girl from college in my life. I thought this was a place where only rich girls were welcome."

"Oh, Rebecca!" cried Ruth. "That isn't so."

"I see it now," agreed the other girl, shortly. "But we always have had to make a bluff at our house. Since *I* can remember, at least. Grandfather was wealthy; but our generation is as poor as Job's turkey.

"I didn't want to appear poor when I arrived here; so I got out the old bags and the big trunk, filled them with papers, and brought them along. A friend lent me that car I arrived in. I—I thought I'd make a splurge right at first, and then my social standing would not be questioned."

"Oh, Rebecca! How foolish," murmured Ruth.

"Don't say that!" stormed the girl. "I see that I started all wrong. But I can't help it now," and suddenly she burst into a passion of weeping.

CHAPTER XVII

WHAT WAS IN REBECCA'S HEART

It was some time before Ruth could quiet the almost hysterical girl. Rebecca Frayne had held herself in check so long, and the bitterness of her position had so festered in her mind, that now the barriers were burst she could not control herself.

But Ruth Fielding was sympathetic. And her heart went out to this lonely and foolish girl as it seldom had to any person in distress. She felt, too, did Ruth, as though it was partly her fault and the fault of the other freshmen that Rebecca was in this state of mind.

She was fearful that having actually forced herself upon Rebecca that the girl might, when she came to herself, turn against her. But at present Rebecca's heart was so full that it spilled over, once having found a confidant.

In Ruth Fielding's arms the unfortunate girl told a story that, if supremely silly from one standpoint, was a perfectly natural and not uncommon story.

She was a girl, born and brought up in a quiet, small town, living in the biggest and finest house in that town, yet having suffered actual privations all her life for the sake of keeping up appearances.

The Frayne family was supposed to be wealthy. Not as wealthy as a generation or so before; still, the Fraynes were looked upon as the leaders in local society.

There was now only an aunt, Rebecca, a younger sister, and a brother who was in New York struggling upward in a commission house.

"And if it were not for the little Fred can spare me and sends me twice a month, I couldn't stay here," Rebecca confessed during this long talk with Ruth. "He's the best boy who ever lived."

"He must be," Ruth agreed. "I'd be glad to have a brother like that."

Rebecca had been hungry for books. She had always hoped to take a college course.

"But I was ignorant of everything," she sighed.

Ruth gathered, too, that the aunt, who was at the nominal head of the Frayne household, was also ignorant. This Aunt Emmy seemed to be an empty-headed creature who thought that the most essential thing for a girl in life was to be fancifully dressed, and to attain a position in society.

Aunt Emmy had evidently filled Rebecca's head with such notions. The girl had come to Ardmore

with a totally wrong idea of what it meant to be in college.

"Why! some of these girls act as waitresses," said Rebecca. "I couldn't do *that* even to obtain the education I want so much. Oh! Aunt Emmy would never hear to it."

"It's a perfectly legitimate way of helping earn one's tuition," Ruth said.

"The Fraynes have never done such things," the other girl said haughtily.

And right there and then Ruth decided that Rebecca Frayne was going to have a very hard time, indeed, at Ardmore unless she learned to look upon life quite differently from the way she had been taught at home.

Already Ruth Fielding had seen enough at Ardmore to know that many of the very girls whose duties Rebecca scorned, were getting more out of their college life than Rebecca Frayne could possibly get unless she took a radically different view of life and its comparative values from that her present standards gave her.

The girls who were waitresses, and did other work to help pay for their tuition or for their board were busy and happy and were respected by their mates. In addition, they were often the best scholars in the classes.

Rebecca was wrong in scorning those who combined domestic service with an attempt to obtain

an education. But Ruth was wise enough to see that this feeling was inbred in Rebecca. It was useless to try to change her opinion upon it.

If Rebecca were poverty-stricken, her purse could not be replenished by any such means as these other girls found to help them over the hard places. In this matter of the tam-o'-shanter, for instance, it would be very difficult to help the girl. Ruth knew better than to offer to pay for the new tam-o'-shanter the freshman could not afford to buy. To make such an offer would immediately close the door of the strange girl's friendship to Ruth. So she did not hint at such a thing. She talked on, beginning to laugh and joke with Rebecca, and finally brought her out of her tears.

"Cheer up," Ruth said. "You are making the worst possible use of your time here—keeping to yourself and being so afraid of making friends. We're not all rich girls, I assure you. And the girls on this corridor are particularly nice."

"I suppose that may be. But if everywhere I go they show so plainly they don't want me——"

"That will stop!" cried Ruth, vigorously. "If I have to go to Dr. Milroth myself, it shall be stopped. It is hazing of the cruelest kind. Oh! what a prettily crocheted table-mat. It's old-fashioned, but pretty."

"Aunty does that, almost all the time," Rebecca said, with a little laugh. "Fred once said—in con-

fidence, of course—that half the family income goes for Aunt Emmy's wool."

"Do *you* do it, too?" Ruth asked suspiciously.

"Oh yes. I can."

"Say! could you crochet one of these tams?" cried Ruth, eagerly.

"Why—I suppose so," admitted the other girl.

"Then, why not? Do it to please the seniors and juniors. It won't hurt to bow to a custom, will it? And you only need buy a few hanks of wool at a time."

Rebecca's face flamed again; but she took the suggestion, after all, with some meekness.

"I *might* do that," she admitted.

"All right. Then you'll be doing your part. And talk to the girls. Let them talk to you. Come down to the dining-room for your meals again. You know, the housekeeper, Mrs. Ebbets, will soon be getting into trouble about you. Somebody will talk to Dr. Milroth or to some other member of the upper faculty."

"I suppose so," groaned Rebecca. "They won't let poor little me alone."

"Oh, you can't expect to have your own way at school," cried Ruth, laughing. "Oh, and say!"

"Well, Miss Fielding?"

"*Do* call me Ruth," begged the girl of the Red Mill. "It won't cost you a cent more," but she

said it so good-naturedly that Rebecca had to laugh.

"I will," said the other girl, vehemently. "You are the very nicest little thing!"

"Well, now that's settled," laughed Ruth, "do something for me, will you?"

"Any—anything I can," agreed Rebecca, with some doubt.

"You know we girls on this corridor are going to have a sitting-room all to ourselves. That corner room that is empty. Everybody is going to buy—is going to give something to help furnish the room."

"Oh, Ruth! I can't——"

"Yes you can," interrupted Ruth, quickly. "When you stop this foolish eating by yourself, you can bring over your alcohol lamp. It's just what we want to make tea on. Now, say you will, Rebecca!"

"I—I will. Why, yes, I can do that," Rebecca agreed.

"Goody! I'll tell the girls. And you'll be as welcome as the flowers in May, lamp or no lamp," she cried, kissing Rebecca again and bustling out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

BEARDING THE LIONS

RUTH had shown a very cheerful face before Rebecca Frayne, but when she was once out of the room the girl of the Red Mill did not show such a superabundance of cheerfulness.

She knew well enough that Rebecca had become so unpopular that public opinion could not be changed regarding her in a moment.

Besides, there were the two upper classes to be considered. Their order regarding the freshmen's head-covering had been flagrantly disobeyed, and would have to be disobeyed for some time to come. A girl cannot crochet a tam-o'-shanter in a minute.

Having undertaken to straighten out Rebecca Frayne's troubles, however, Ruth did not publicly shrink from the task. She was one who made up her mind quickly, and having made it up, set to work immediately to carry the matter through.

Merry Dexter, the first senior she had met upon coming to Ardmore, was kindly disposed toward her, and Ruth knew that Miss Dexter was

an influential member of her class. Therefore, Ruth took her trouble—and Rebecca's—directly to Miss Dexter.

Yet, she did not feel that she had a right to explain, even to this one senior, all that Rebecca Frayne had confided to her. She realized that the girl, with her false standards of respectability and social standing, would never be able to hold up her head at college if her real financial situation were known to the girls in general. Ruth was bound, however, to take Miss Dexter somewhat into her confidence to obtain a hearing. She put the matter before the senior as nicely as possible, saying in conclusion:

"And she will knit herself a tam of the proper color just as soon as possible. No girl, you know, Miss Dexter, likes to admit that she is poor. It is dreadfully embarrassing. So I hope that this matter will be adjusted without her situation being discussed."

"Goodness! *I* can't change things," the senior declared. "Not unless that girl agrees to do as she is told—like the rest of you freshies."

"Then my opinion of your class, Miss Dexter," Ruth said firmly, "must be entirely wrong. I did not believe that they ordered us to wear baby blue tams just out of an arbitrary desire to make us obey. Had I believed *that* I would not have bought a new tam myself!"

"You wouldn't?"

"No, Miss Dexter. Nor would a great many of us freshmen. We believed the order had a deeper significance—and it *had*. It helped our class get together. We are combined now, we are a social body. And I believe that if I took this matter up with Rebecca's class, and explained just her situation to them (which, of course, I do not want to do), the freshmen as a whole would back me in a revolt against the upper classes."

"You're pretty sure of that, Ruth Fielding, are you?" demanded the senior.

"Yes, I am. We'd all refuse to wear the new tams. You seniors and juniors would have a nice time sending us all to Coventry, wouldn't you? If you didn't want to eat with us, you'd all go hungry for a long time before the freshmen would do as Rebecca foolishly did."

Miss Dexter laughed at that. And then she hugged Ruth.

"I believe you are a dear girl, with a lot of good sense in your head," she said. "But you must come before our executive committee and talk to them."

"Oh, dear! Beard the lions in their den?" cried Ruth.

"Yes, my dear. I cannot be your spokesman."

Ruth found this a harder task than she had bargained for; but she went that same evening to

a hastily called meeting of the senior committee. Perhaps Miss Dexter had done more for her than she agreed, however, for Ruth found these older girls very kind and she seemingly made them easily understand Rebecca's situation without being obliged to say in just so many words that the girl was actually poverty-stricken.

And it was probable, too, that Ruth Fielding helped herself in this incident as much as she did her classmate. The members of the older classes thereafter gave the girl of the Red Mill considerably more attention than she had previously received. Ruth began to feel surprised that she had so many warm friends and pleasant acquaintances in the college, even among the sophomores of Edith Phelps' stamp. Edith Phelps found her tart jokes about the "canned-drama authoress" falling rather flat, so she dropped the matter.

Older girls stopped on the walks to talk to Ruth. They sat beside her in chapel and at other assemblies, and seemed to like to talk with her. Although Ruth did not hold an office in her own class organization, yet she bade fair to become soon the most popular freshman at Ardmore.

Ruth was perfectly unconscious of this fact, for she had not a spark of vanity in her make-up. Her mind was so filled with other and more important things that her social conquests impressed her but little. She did, however, think a good bit

about poor Rebecca Frayne's situation. She warned her personal friends among the freshmen, especially those at Dare Hall, to say nothing to Rebecca about the unfortunate affair.

Rebecca came into the dining-room again. Ruth knew that she had actually begun to crochet a baby blue tam-o'-shanter. But it was a question in Ruth's mind if the odd girl would be able to "keep up appearances" on the little money she had left and that which her brother could send her from time to time. It was quite tragic, after all. Rebecca was sure of good and sufficient food as long as she could pay her board; but the girl undoubtedly needed other things which she could not purchase.

Naturally, youth cannot give its entire attention to even so tragic a matter as this. Ruth's gay friends acted as counterweights in her mind to Rebecca's troubles.

The girls were out on the lake very frequently as the cold weather continued; but Ruth never saw again the strange girl whom she and Helen had interviewed at night on Bliss Island.

Hearing from Aunt Alvirah as she did with more or less frequency, the girl of the Red Mill was assured that Maggie seemed content and was proving a great help to the crippled old housekeeper. Maggie seemed quite settled in her situation.

"Just because that queer girl looked like Maggie doesn't prove that Maggie knows her," Ruth told herself. "Still—it's odd."

Stormy weather kept the college girls indoors a good deal; and the general sitting-room on Ruth's corridor became the most social spot in the whole college.

The girls whose dormitory rooms were there, irrespective of class, all shared in the furnishing of the sitting-room. Second-hand furniture is always to be had of dealers near an institution like Ardmore. Besides, the girls all owned little things they could spare for the general comfort, like Rebecca Frayne's alcohol lamp.

Helen had a tea set; somebody else furnished trays. In fact, all the "comforts of home" were supplied to that sitting-room; and the girls were considered very fortunate by their mates in other parts of the hall, and, indeed, in the other three dormitory buildings.

But during the holiday recess something happened that bade fair to deprive Ruth and her friends of their special perquisite. Dr. McCurdy's wife's sister came to Ardmore. The McCurdys did not keep house, preferring to board. They could find no room for Mrs. Jaynes, until it was remembered that there was an unassigned dormitory room at Dare Hall.

Many of the girls had gone home over the brief

holidays; but our three friends from Briarwood had remained at Ardmore.

So Ruth and Helen and Jennie Stone chanced to be among the girls present when the housekeeper of Dare Hall came into the sitting-room and, to quote Jennie, informed them that they must "vamoose the ranch."

"That is what Ann Hicks would call it," Jennie said, defending her language when taken to task for it. "We've just got to get out—and it's a mean shame."

Dr. McCurdy was one of the important members of the faculty. Of course, the girls on that corridor had no real right to the extra room. All they could do was to voice their disappointment—and they did that, one may be sure, with vociferation.

"And just when we had come to be so comfortably fixed here," groaned one, when the housekeeper had departed. "I know I shall dis-*like* that Mrs. Jaynes extremely."

"We won't speak to her!" cried Helen, in a somewhat vixenish tone.

"Maybe she won't care if we don't," laughed Ruth.

But it was no laughing matter, as they all felt. They made a gloomy party in the pretty sitting-room that last evening of its occupancy as a community resort.

"There's Clara Mayberry in her rocker again on that squeaky board," Rebecca Frayne remarked. "I hope she rocks on that board every evening over this woman's head who has turned us out."

"Let's all hope so," murmured Helen.

Jennie Stone suddenly sat upright in the rocker she was occupying, but continued to glare at the ceiling. A board in the floor of the room above had frequently annoyed them before. Clara Mayberry sometimes forgot and placed her rocker on that particular spot.

"If—if she had to listen to that long," gasped Jennie suddenly, "she would go crazy. She's just that kind of nervous female. I saw her at chapel this morning."

"But even Clara couldn't stand the squeak of that board long," Ruth observed, smiling.

Without another word Jennie left the room. She came back later, so full of mystery, as Helen declared, that she seemed on the verge of bursting.

However, Jennie refused to explain herself in any particular; but the board in Clara Mayberry's room did not squeak again that evening.

CHAPTER XIX

A DEEP, DARK PLOT

"HEAVY is actually losing flesh," Helen declared to Ruth. "I can see it."

"You mean you *can't* see it," laughed her chum. "That is, you can't see so much of it as there used to be. If she keeps on with the rowing machine work in the gym and the basket ball practise and dancing, she will soon be the thinnest girl who ever came to Ardmore."

"Oh, never!" cried Helen. "I don't believe I should like Heavy so much if she wasn't a *little* fat."

People who had not seen Jennie Stone for some time observed the change in her appearance more particularly than did her two close friends. This was proved when Mr. Cameron and Tom arrived.

For, as the girls did not go home for just a few days, Helen's father and her twin unexpectedly appeared at college on Christmas Eve, and their company delighted the chums immensely.

On Friday evenings the girls could have com-

pany, and on all Saturday afternoons, even during the college term. Also a girl could have a young man call on her Sunday evening, provided he took her to service at chapel.

The three Briarwood friends had had no such company heretofore. They made the most of Mr. Cameron and Tom, therefore, during Christmas week.

There was splendid sleighing, and the skating on the lake was at its very best. Ruth insisted upon including Rebecca Frayne in some of their parties, and Rebecca proved to be good fun.

Tom stared at Jennie Stone, round-eyed, when first he saw her.

"What's the matter with you, Tom Cameron?" the fleshy girl asked, rather tartly. "Didn't you ever see a good-looking girl before?"

"But say, Jennie!" he cried, "are you going into a decline?"

"I decline to answer," she responded. But she dimpled when she said it, and evidently considered Tom's rather blunt remark a compliment.

The Christmas holidays were over all too soon, it seemed to the girls. Yet they took up the class work again with vigor.

Their acquaintanceship was broadening daily, both in the student body and among the instructors. Most of the strangeness of this new college world had worn off. Ruth and Helen and Jennie

were full-fledged "Ardmores" now, quite as devoted to the college as they had been to dear old Briarwood.

After New Year's there was a raw and rainy spell that spoiled many of the outdoor sports. Practice in the gymnasium increased, and Helen said that Jennie Stone was bound to work herself down to a veritable shadow if the bad weather continued long.

Ruth was in Rebecca's room one dingy, rainy afternoon, having skipped gymnasium work of all kind for the day. The proprietor of the room had finished her baby blue cap and had worn it the first time that week.

"I feel that they are not all staring at me now," she confessed to Ruth.

Ruth was at the piles of old papers which Rebecca had hidden under a half-worn portierre she had brought from home.

"Do you know," the girl of the Red Mill said reflectively, "these old things are awfully interesting, Becky?"

"What old things?"

"These papers. I've opened one bundle. They were all printed in Richmond during the Civil War. Why, paper must have been awfully scarce then. Some of these are actually printed on wrapping paper—you can scarcely read the print."

"Ought to look at those Charleston papers,"

said Rebecca, carelessly. "There are full files of those, too, I believe. Why, some of them are printed on wall paper."

"No!"

"Yes they are. Ridiculous, wasn't it?"

Ruth sat silent for a while. Finally she asked:

"Are you sure, Becky, that you have quite complete files here of this Richmond paper? For all the war time, I mean?"

"Yes. And of the South Carolina paper, too. Father collected them during and immediately following the war. He was down there for years, you see."

"I see," Ruth said quietly, and for a long time said nothing more.

But that evening she wrote several letters which she did not show Helen, and took them herself to the mailbag in the lower hall.

Before this, Mrs. Jaynes, Dr. McCurdy's sister-in-law, was settled in the room which had formerly been used by the girls as their own particular sitting-room. She was not an attractive woman at all; so it was not hard for her youthful associates on that corridor of Dare Hall to declare war upon Mrs. Jaynes.

Indeed, without having been introduced to a single girl there, Mrs. Jaynes eyed them all as though she suspected they belonged to a tribe of Bushmen.

Naturally, during hours of relaxation, and occasionally at other times, the girls joked and laughed and raced through the halls and sang and otherwise acted as a crowd of young people usually act.

Mrs. Jaynes was plainly of that sort that believes that all youthfulness and ebullition of spirits should be suppressed. Luckily, she met the girls but seldom—only when she was going to and from her room. On stormy days she remained shut up in her apartment most of the time, and Mrs. Ebbetts sent a maid up with her tray at meal time. She never ate in the Dare Hall dining-room.

Meantime, Jennie Stone had several mysterious sessions with certain of the girls who felt quite as she did regarding the usurpation of Dr. McCurdy's sister-in-law of the spare room. Had Ruth not been so busy in other directions she would have realized that a plot of some kind was in process of formation, for Helen was in it, as well.

Jennie Stone had made a friend of Clara Mayberry on the floor above. In fact, a number of the girls on the lower corridor affected by the presence of Mrs. Jaynes, were in and out of Clara's room all day long. None of these girls remained long at a time—not more than half an hour; but another visitor always appeared before

the first left, right through the day, from breakfast call till "lights out." And after retiring hour there began to be seen figures stealing through the corridors and on the stairway between the two floors. That is, there would have been seen such ghostly marauders had there been anybody to watch.

Mrs. Jaynes crossly complained to Mrs. Ebbetts that she was kept awake all night long—and all day, for that matter! But as she never put her head out of her room after the lights were lowered in the corridors, she did not discover the soft-footed spectres of the night.

"But," she complained to Mrs. Ebbetts, "it is the noisiest room I ever was in. Such a squeaking you never heard! And all the time, day and night."

"I do not understand that at all," said the puzzled housekeeper.

"I'd like to know how the girl who had that room before I took it, stood that awful squeaking noise," said the visitor.

"Why, Mrs. Jaynes," said the housekeeper, "no girl slept there. It was a sitting-room."

"Even so, I cannot understand how anybody could endure the noise. If I believed in such things I should declare the room was haunted."

"Indeed, Madam!" gasped the housekepeer. "I do not understand it."

"Well, I cannot endure it. I shall tell my sister that I cannot remain here at Ardmore unless she finds me other lodgings. That awful *squeak, squeak, squeak* continues day and night. It is unbearable."

In the end, Dr. McCurdy found lodgings for his sister-in-law in Greenburg. The girls of Ruth's corridor were delighted, and that night held a regular orgy in the recovered sitting-room.

"Thank goodness!" sighed Jennie Stone, "no more up and down all night for us, either. We may sleep in peace, as well as occupy the room in peace."

"What *do* you mean, Heavy?" demanded Ruth.

"Oh, Ruthie! That's one time we put one over on you, dear," said the fleshy girl sweetly. "You were not asked to join in the conspiracy. We feared your known sympathetic nature would revolt."

"But explain!"

"Why, Clara let us use her rocking chair," Jennie said demurely. "It's a very nice chair. We all rocked in it, one after another, half-hour watches being assigned——"

"Not at night?" cried the horror-stricken Ruth.

"Oh, yes. All day and all night. Every little minute that rocker was going upon the squeaky board. It's a wonder the board is not worn out," chuckled the wicked Jennie.

"Well, I never!" proclaimed Ruth, aghast. "What won't you think of next, Jennie Stone?"

"I don't know. I know I'm awfully smart," sighed Jennie. "I did so much of the rocking myself, however, that I don't much care if I never see a rocking-chair again."

CHAPTER XX

TWO SURPRISES

RUTH FIELDING knew that Rebecca Frayne was painfully embarrassed for money. She managed to find the wherewithal for her board, and her textbooks of course had been paid for at the beginning of the college year. But there are always incidentals and unforeseen small expenses, which crop up in a most unexpected manner and clamor for payment.

Rebecca never opened her lips about these troubles, despite the fact that she loved Ruth and was much with the girl of the Red Mill. But Ruth was keen-eyed. She knew that Rebecca suffered for articles of clothing. She saw that her raiment was becoming very, very shabby.

The girl in this trouble was foolish, of course. But foolishness is a disease not so easily cured. There was not the slightest chance of giving Rebecca anything that she needed; Ruth knew that quite well. Her finery—and cheap enough it was—the girl would flaunt to the bitter end.

Deep down she was a good girl in every re-

spect; but she did put on airs and ape the wealthy girls she saw. What garments she owned had been ultra-fashionable in cut, if poor in texture, when she had come to college. But fashions change so frequently nowadays that already poor Rebecca Frayne was behind the styles—and she knew it and grieved bitterly.

Most of her mates at Dare Hall, the freshmen especially, usually dressed in short cloth skirts and middy blouses, with a warm coat over all in cold weather. Would Rebecca be caught going to classes in such an outfit? Not much! That was why her better clothes wore out so quickly and now looked so shabby. Jennie Stone said, with disgust, and with more than a little truth, perhaps:

"That girl primps to go to recitations just as though she were bound for a party. I don't see how she finds time for study."

Ruth realized that Rebecca was made that way, and that was all there was to it. She wasted no strength, nor did she run the risk of being bad friends with the unwise girl, by criticising these silly things. Ruth believed in being helpful, or else keeping still.

Rebecca could never be induced to try to do the things that other poor girls did at college to help pay their expenses. Perhaps she was not really fitted for such services, and would only have failed.

Other girls acted as waitresses, did sewing, one looked after the linen for one of the dormitories, another darned hose and repaired lingerie. Dr. Frances Milroth's own personal secretary was a junior who was working her way through Ardmore and was taking a high mark, too, in her studies.

One girl helped Mrs. Leidenburg with her children during several hours of each day. Some girls were agents for articles which their college mates were glad to secure easily and quickly.

Indeed, the field of endeavor seemed rather well covered, and it would have been hard to discover anything new for Rebecca Frayne to do, had the girl even been willing to "go into trade," a thing Rebecca had told Ruth a Frayne had never done.

This attitude of the Frayne family seemed quite ridiculous to Ruth, but she knew it was absolutely useless to scold Rebecca.

Indeed, it was not Ruth Fielding's way to be a scold. If she could not be helpful she preferred to ignore that which she saw was wrong. And in Rebecca Frayne's case she was determined to be helpful if she could. Rebecca was a bright scholar. After all, she would shine in her class before all was said and done. They could not afford to lose such a really bright girl from among the freshmen.

Often on stormy days Ruth spent the time be-

tween recitations and dinner in Rebecca's room.

"I never saw anybody so fond of old papers as you are, Ruthie," Rebecca said. "Do take 'em all if you like. Of course, I'll never be silly enough to carry them back home with me. They are only useful to help build the fire."

"Don't dare destroy one of them, Rebecca Frayne!" Ruth had warned her—and actually made her promise that she would not do so.

Then the replies to Ruth's letters came. She had gone all through the bundles of papers by this time, arranged them according to their dates of issue, and wrapped the different years' issues in strong paper. Rebecca could not see for the life of her, she said, what Ruth was about.

"Surely they can't be worth much as old paper, Ruthie. I know you are a regular little business woman; but junk men aren't allowed on the college grounds."

"Expressmen are, my dear," laughed Ruth.

"What do you mean? What *are* you going to do with those papers?"

"You said you didn't care——"

"And I don't. They are yours to do with as you please," said the generous Rebecca Frayne.

"To punish you," Ruth said seriously, "I ought really to take you at your word," and she shook her head.

"What meanest thou, my fair young lady?" asked Rebecca, laughing.

"Read this," commanded Ruth, handing her, with the air of the stage hero "producing the papers," one of the letters she had received. "Cast your glance over this, Miss Frayne."

The other received the letter curiously, and read it with dawning surprise. She read it twice and then gazed at Ruth with almost speechless amazement.

"Well! what do you think of your Aunt Ruth *now?*" demanded the girl of the Red Mill, laughing.

"It—it can't be *so,* Ruthie!" murmured Rebecca Frayne, the hand which held the letter fairly shaking.

"It's just as *so* as it can be," and Ruth continued to laugh.

The tears suddenly flooded into Rebecca's eyes. She could not turn quickly enough to hide them from Ruth's keen vision. But all she said was:

"Well, Ruthie! I congratulate you. Think of it! Two hundred dollars offered for each set of those old papers. Well!"

"You see, it would scarcely have been wise to have built the fire with them," Ruth said drily.

"I—I should say not. And—and they have lain in our attic for years."

"And you brought them to college as waste paper," Ruth added.

Rebecca was silent. Ruth, smiling roguishly, stole up behind her. Suddenly she put both arms around Rebecca Frayne and hugged her tight.

"Becky! Don't you understand?" she cried.

"Understand what?" Rebecca asked gruffly, trying to dash away her few tears.

"Why, honey, I did it for *you*. I believed the papers must be worth something. I had heard of a set of New York illustrated papers for the years of the Civil War selling for a big price. These, I believed, must be even more interesting to collectors of such things.

"So I wrote to Mr. Cameron, and he sent me the names of old book dealers, and *they* sent me the addresses of several collectors. This Mr. Radley has a regular museum of such things, and he offers the best price—four hundred dollars for the lot if they prove to be as perfect as I said they were. And they *are*."

"Yes—but——"

"And, of course, the money is yours, Rebecca," said Ruth, promptly. "You don't for a moment suppose that I would take your valuable papers and cheat you out of the reward just because I happened to know more about their worth than you did? What do you take me for?"

"Oh—oh, Ruthie!"

"What do you take me for?" again demanded Ruth Fielding, quite as though she were offended.

"For the best and dearest girl who ever lived!" cried Rebecca Frayne, and cast herself upon Ruth's breast, holding her tightly while she sobbed there.

This was one surprise. But there was another later, and this was a surprise for Ruth herself.

She was very glad to have been the means of finding Rebecca such a nice little fortune as this that came to her for the old periodicals. With what the girl's brother could send her, Rebecca would be pretty sure of sufficient money to carry her through her freshman year and pay for her second year's tuition at Ardmore.

"Something may be found then for Rebecca to do," thought Ruth, "that will not so greatly shock her notions of gentility. Dear me! she's as nice a girl as ever lived; but she is a problem."

Ruth had other problems, however, on her mind. One of these brought about the personal surprise mentioned above. She had found time finally to complete the scenario of "Crossed Wires," and after some changes had been made in it, Mr. Hammond had informed her that it would be put in the hands of a director for production. It called for so many outdoor scenes, however, that the new film would not be made until spring.

Spring was now fast approaching, and Ruth determined to be at the Red Mill on a visit when the first scenes were taken for her photo-drama.

Of course, if she went, Helen must go. They stood excellently well in all their classes, and it was not hard to persuade Dr. Milroth, who had good reports of both freshmen, to let them go to Cheslow.

Ruth's coming home was in the nature of a surprise to Uncle Jabez and Aunt Alvirah. The old housekeeper was outspoken in her joy at seeing "her pretty" once more. Uncle Jabez was startled into perhaps a warmer greeting of his niece than he ordinarily considered advisable.

"I declare for't, Ruth! Ain't nothin' the matter, is there?" he asked, holding her hand and staring into her face with serious intent.

"Oh, no, Uncle. Nothing at all the matter. Just ran home to see how you all were, and to watch them take the pictures of the old mill."

"Ain't lost any of that money, have ye?" persisted the miller.

"Not a penny. And Mr. Hammond sent me a nice check on account of royalties, too," and she dimpled and laughed at him.

"All right," grunted Uncle Jabez. "Ye wanter watch out for that there money. Business is onsartain. Ain't no knowin' when everything'll go to pot *here*. I never see the times so hard."

But Ruth was not much disturbed by such talk. Uncle Jabez had been prophesying disaster ever since she had known him.

Maggie welcomed Ruth cordially, as well as Ben. Maggie was still the puzzling combination of characteristics that she had seemed to Ruth from the first. She was willing to work, and was kind to Aunt Alvirah; but she always withdrew into herself if anybody tried to talk much to her.

The others at the Red Mill had become used to the girl's reticence; but to Ruth it remained just as tantalizing. She had the feeling that Maggie was by no means in her right environment.

"Doesn't she ever write letters?" Ruth asked Aunt Alvirah. "Doesn't she ever have a visitor?"

"Why, bless ye, my pretty! I don't know as she writes much," Aunt Alvirah said, as she moved about the kitchen in her old slow fashion. "Oh, my back! and oh, my bones! Well Ruthie, she reads a lot. She's all for books, I guess, like you be. But she don't never talk much. And a visitor? Why, come to think on't, she did have one visitor."

"Is that so?" cried the curious Ruth. "Let's hear about it. I feel gossipy, Aunt Alvirah," and she laughed.

She knew that Maggie was away from the house, and they were alone. She could trust Aunt

Alvirah to say nothing to the girl regarding her queries.

"Yes, my pretty," the old woman said, "she did have one visitor. Another gal come to see her the very week you went away to college, Ruthie."

"Is that so? Who was she?"

"Maggie didn't say. I didn't ask her. Ye see, she ain't one ter confide in a body," explained Aunt Alvirah, shaking her head and lowering herself into her rocking chair. "Oh, my back! and oh, my bones!"

"But didn't you see this visitor?"

"Why, yes, Ruthie. I seen her. It was funny, too," Aunt Alvirah said, shaking her head. "I meant to write to you about it; then I forgot.

"I hears somebody knock on the door one day, and I opened the door and there I declare stood Maggie herself. Or, I thought 'twas her."

"What?" gasped Ruth, very much interested.

"She looked a sight like her," said Aunt Alvirah, laughing to herself at the remembrance. "Yet I knowed Maggie had gone upstairs to make the beds, and this here girl who had knocked on the door was all dressed up."

" 'Why, Maggie!' says I. And she says, kinder tart-like:

" 'I ain't Maggie. But I want to see her.'

"So I axed her in; but she wouldn't come. I

seen then maybe she was a little younger than Maggie is. Howsomever I called to Maggie, and she went out, and the two of 'em walked up and down the road for an hour. The other gal never come in. And I seen her start back toward Cheslow. Maggie never said no word about her from that day to this.

"Do you know what I think about it, Ruthie?" concluded Aunt Alvirah.

"No, Aunt Alvirah," said the girl of the Red Mill, reflectively.

"I think that was Maggie's sister. Maybe she works out for somebody in Cheslow."

Ruth merely nodded. She did not think much of that phase of the matter. What she was really puzzling over was her memory of the girl she and Helen had interviewed on the island in Lake Remona before the Christmas holidays.

That girl had looked very much like Maggie, too!

CHAPTER XXI

MANY THINGS HAPPEN

It was, of course, hard to tell by merely seeing them taken what the pictures about the old Red Mill would be like; but Ruth and Helen both acted in them as "extras" and were greatly excited over the film, one may be sure.

The director, not the cross Mr. Grimes this time, assured Ruth that he was confident "Crossed Wires" would make good on the screen. Hazel Gray played the lead in the picture, as she had in "The Heart of a School Girl," and Ruth and Helen were glad to meet the bright little screen actress again.

Miss Gray seemed to have forgotten all about Tom Cameron and Ruth, for some reason, felt glad. She ventured to ask Helen if her twin was still as enamored of the young actress as he had seemed to be the year before.

"Why, no," Helen said thoughtfully. "You know how it is with boys; they have one craze after another, Ruthie."

"No. Do they?" asked the other.

"Yes. Tom made a collection of the photographs of a slap-stick comedian at first. Then he decorated his room at Seven Oaks with all the pictures he could find of Miss Gray. Now, when I was over there with father the other day, what do you suppose is his chief decoration on his room walls?"

"I haven't the least idea," Ruth confessed.

"Great, ugly, brutal boxers! Prize-fighters! Awful pictures, Ruth! I suppose next he will make a collection of the photographs of burglars!" and Helen laughed.

The chums were whisked back to Ardmore, having been absent five days. They were so well prepared in their recitations, however, that they did not fall behind in any particular. Indeed, these two bright-minded girls found it not difficult to keep up with their classes.

Even Jennie Stone, leisure loving as she naturally was, had no real difficulty in being well to the front in her studies. And she had become one of the most faithful of devotees of gymnastic practice.

Ardmore's second basket ball five pushed the first team hard; and Jennie Stone was on the second five. As the spring training for the boats opened she, as well as Ruth and Helen, tried for the freshmen eight-oared shell. All three won places in that crew.

Jennie was still somewhat over-weight. But the instructor put her at bow and her weight counted there. Ruth was stroke and Helen Number 2. As practice went on it was proved that the freshman crew was a very well balanced one.

They more than once "bumped" the sophomore shell in trial races, and once came very near to catching the junior eight. The seniors and juniors began now to pay more attention to the freshman class; especially to those members who showed well in athletics.

Because of their characters and their class standing, several of the instructors besides Miss Cullam, the mathematics teacher, were the friends of the Briarwoods. Miss Cullam had shown a warm appreciation of Ruth Fielding's character all through the year. Not that Ruth was a prize pupil in Miss Cullam's study, for she was not. Mathematics was the one study it was hard for Ruth to interest herself in. But when the girl of the Red Mill had a hard thing to do, she always put her whole mind to it; and, therefore, she made a good mark in mathematics in spite of her distaste for the study.

"You are doing well, Miss Fielding," Miss Cullam declared. "Better than I expected. I have no doubt that you will pass well in the year's examinations."

"And you won't be afraid that I'll crib the answers, Miss Cullam?" Ruth asked, laughing.

"Hush! don't repeat gossip," Miss Cullam said smiling, however, rather ruefully. "Even when the gossip emanates from an old cross-patch of a teacher who gets nervous and worries about improbabilities. No. I do not believe any of my girls would take advantage of the examination papers. Yet, I would give a good deal to know just where those papers and that vase went."

"Has nothing ever been heard from Miss Rolff since she left Ardmore?" Ruth asked.

"No. Not a word. And it is hard on the sororities, too. Heretofore, the girls have enjoyed the benefits of the associations for three years. *You,* I am sure, Ruth, would have been invited by this time to join one of the sororities."

"And I should dearly love to," sighed Ruth. "The Kappa Alpha. It looks good to me. But there are other things in college—and out of it, too. Oh see, Miss Cullam! Here is what I wanted to show you," and the girl of the Red Mill brought forth a large envelope from her handbag.

They were talking together in the library on this occasion, it being a Saturday afternoon when there was nothing particular to take up either the teacher's time or the pupil's. Ruth emptied the envelope on the table.

"See these photographs? They are stills taken in connection with my new scenario. I want you

to see just how lovely a place the old Red Mill, where I live, is."

Miss Cullam adjusted her eyeglasses with a smile, and picked up the topmost picture which Mr. Hammond had sent to Ruth.

"That's dear old Aunt Alvirah herself feeding the chickens. She doesn't know that we took that picture of her. If I had said 'photograph' to the dear old creature, she would have been determined to put on her best bib and tucker!

"That's the back yard. Isn't it, dear?"

"Who is that on the porch?" asked Miss Cullam.

"On the porch? Why, *is* anybody on the porch? I don't remember that."

Ruth stooped to peer closer at the unmounted photograph in the teacher's hand.

"Why! there *is* somebody standing there," she murmured. "You can see the head and shoulders just as plain——"

"And the face," said Miss Cullam, with strange eagerness.

"Oh, I know!" cried Ruth, and she laughed heartily. "Of course. That's Maggie."

"Maggie?"

"Yes. The girl who helps Aunt Alvirah. And she's quite an interesting character, Miss Cullam. I'll tell you about her some day."

"Yes?" said Miss Cullam, reflectively.

"Now, here is the front of the old house——"

"Allow me to keep this picture for a little while, will you, Miss Fielding?" broke in the teacher, still staring at the clearly exposed face of Maggie on the porch.

"Why, yes, certainly," responded the girl, curiously.

"I wish to show this girl's face to somebody else. She seems very familiar to me," the mathematics teacher said.

CHAPTER XXII

CAN IT BE A CLUE?

RUTH gave the matter of Maggie's photograph very little thought. Not at that time, at least. She merely handed the print over to Miss Cullam and forgot all about it.

These were busy days, both in the classroom and out of it. The warmth of late spring was in the air; every girl who felt at all the blood coursing in her veins, tried to be out of doors.

The whole college was eager regarding the coming boat races. Ardmore was to try out her first eight-oared crew with three of several colleges, and two of the trials would be held upon Lake Remona.

There were local races between the class crews every Saturday afternoon. Jennie Stone had to choose between basket ball and rowing, for there were Saturdays when both sports were in ascendency.

"No use. I can't be in two places at once," declared Jennie, regretfully resigning from the basket-ball team.

"No, honey," said Helen. "You're not big enough for that now. A few months ago you might have played basket ball and sent your shadow to pull an oar with us. See what it means to get thin."

"My! I feel like another girl," said the fleshy one ecstatically. "What do you suppose my father will say to me in June?"

"He'll say," suggested Helen, giggling, " 'you took so much away, why do you bring so little back from college?' "

It was several days before Miss Cullam returned to Ruth the picture she had borrowed; and when she did she made a statement regarding it that very much astonished the girl of the Red Mill.

"I will tell you now, my dear; why I wished to keep the photograph," the teacher said. "I showed it to Dr. Milroth and to several of the other members of the faculty."

"Indeed?" responded Ruth, quite puzzled.

"Some of them agree with me. Dr. Milroth does not. Nevertheless, I wish you would tell me all about this Maggie who works for your aunt——"

"Maggie!" gasped Ruth. "What do you mean, Miss Cullam? Was it because her face is in the picture that you borrowed it?"

"Yes, my dear. I think, as do some of the other

instructors, that Maggie looks very much like the Miss Rolff who last year occupied the room you have and who left us so strangely before the close of the semester."

"Oh, Miss Cullam!"

"Foolish, am I?" laughed the teacher. "Well, I suppose so. You know all about Maggie, do you?"

"No!" gasped Ruth.

Eagerly she explained to the mathematics teacher how the strange girl had appeared at the Red Mill and why she had remained there. Miss Cullam was no less excited than Ruth when she heard these particulars.

"I must tell Dr. Milroth this," Miss Cullam declared. "Say nothing about it, Ruth Fielding. And she says her name is 'Maggie'? Of course! Margaret Rolff. I believe that is who she is."

"But to go out to housework," Ruth said doubtfully.

"That doesn't matter. We must learn more about this Maggie. Say nothing until I have spoken to Dr. Milroth again."

But if this was a clue to the identity and whereabouts of the girl who had left Ardmore so abruptly the year before, Ruth learned something the very next day that, unfortunately, put it quite beyond her ability to discover further details in the matter.

A letter arrived from Aunt Alvirah and after reading it once through Ruth hurried away to Miss Cullam with the surprising news it contained.

Maggie had left the Red Mill. Without any explanation save that she had been sent for and must go, the strange girl had left Aunt Alvirah and Uncle Jabez, and they did not know her destination. Ben, the hired man, had driven her to the Cheslow railway station and she had taken an eastbound train. Otherwise, nothing was known of the strange girl's movements.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Miss Cullam. "I am certain, then, that she is Margaret Rolff. Even Dr. Milroth has come to agree that it may be that strange girl. I hoped there was a chance of learning what really became of those missing examination papers—and, of course, the vase. But how can we discover what became of them if the girl has disappeared again?"

"Well, it's a very strange thing, I am sure," Ruth admitted. "Of course, I'll write the folks at the Red Mill that if Maggie—or whatever her real name is—ever turns up there again, they must let me know at once."

"Yes, do," begged the teacher. "Now that the subject has come up again I feel more disturbed than ever over those papers. *Were* they lost, or weren't they? My dear Ruth! you don't know

how I feel about that mystery. All these girls whom I think so highly of, are still under suspicion."

"I hope nothing like that will happen this year, dear Miss Cullam," Ruth said warmly. "I feel that we freshmen all want to pass our examinations honestly—or not at all."

"That is exactly what I believe about the other girls," groaned the teacher. "But the sorority members admit that Margaret Rolff was instructed to remove the Egyptian vase from the library as a part of the stunt she was expected to do during the initiation ceremonies.

"And in that vase were my papers. Of course, the girls did not know the examination papers were there before the vase was taken. *But what became of them afterward?*"

"Why, Miss Cullam," Ruth said thoughtfully, "of course they must still be in the vase."

"Perhaps. Then, perhaps not," murmured the teacher. "Who knows?"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SQUALL

THE first college eight went off to Gillings, and, as it was only a few miles by rail, half the student body, at least, went to root for the crew. The Ardmore boat was beaten.

"Oh, dear! To come home plucked in such a disgusting way," groaned Helen, who, with Jennie, as well as Ruth, was among the disgruntled and disappointed girls who had gone to see the race. "It is awful."

"It's taught them a lesson, I wager," Ruth said practically. "We have all been rowing in still water. The river at Gillings is rough, and the local eight was used to it. I say, girls!"

"Say it," said Jennie, gruffly. "It can't be anything that will hurt us after what we've seen to-day. Three whole boatlengths ahead!"

"Never mind," broke in Helen. "The races with Hampton and Beardsley will be on our own lake."

"And if there is a flutter of wind, our first eight will be beaten again," from Jennie Stone.

"No, no, girls!" Ruth cried. "I heard the coach tell them that hereafter she was going to make them row if there was a hurricane. And that's what *we* must do."

"*Who* must do, Ruthie? What do you mean?" asked Helen.

"The freshman eight."

"E-lu-ci-date," drawled Jennie.

"We must learn to handle our shell in rough water. If there is a breath of wind stirring we mustn't beat it to land," said Ruth, vigorously. "Let's learn to handle our shell in really rough water."

"Sounds reasonable," admitted Jennie. "Shall we all take out accident policies?"

"No. All learn to swim. That's the wisest course," laughed Ruth.

"Ain't it the *trewth?*" agreed Jennie, making a face. "I'm not much of a swimmest in fresh water. But I never could sink."

The freshmen with the chums in the eight-oared shell proved to be all fair swimmers. And that crew was not the only one that redoubled its practice after the disastrous race at Gillings College.

Each class crew did its very best. The coaches were extremely stern with the girls. Ardmore had a reputation for turning out champion crews, and the year before, on their own water, the Ardmore eight had beaten Gillings emphatically.

"But if we can win races only on our own course," *The Jasper,* the Ardmore College paper declared, "what is the use of supporting an athletic association and four perfectly useless crews?"

They had all been so sure of victory over Gillings—both the student body and the faculty—that the disgrace of their beating cut all the deeper.

"It is fortunate," said the same stern commenter, "that our races with Hampton, and again with Beardsley, will be on Lake Remona. At least, our crew knows the water here—on a perfectly calm day, at any rate."

"I see Merry Dexter's fine Italian hand in *that,*" Ruth declared, when she and her chums read the criticism of the chief college eight. "And if it is true of the senior shell, how much more so of our own? We must be ready to risk a little something for the sake of pulling a good race."

"Goodness!" murmured Helen. "When we're away off there in the middle of the course between the landing and Bliss Island, for instance, and a squall threatens, it is going to take pluck, my dear, to keep us all steady."

"I tell you what!" exclaimed Jennie Stone.

"Tell it, if you're sure it won't hurt us," laughed Helen.

"Let's get the coach to have us circle the island when we're out in practice. It's always a little rough off both ends of Bliss Island, and we should get used to rough water before our final home races."

For, before the season was over, the four Ardmore eights would compete, and that race was the one which the three under-classes particularly trained for.

Jennie's suggestion sounded practical to her chums; so there were three already agreed when it was broached to the freshmen eight. The coach thought well of it, too; for there was always a motor boat supposed to be in sight of the shells when they were out at practice.

This was in April, and, in Ardmore's latitude, a very uncertain month April is—a time of showers and smiles, calms and uncertain gales. Nevertheless, so thoroughly were the freshmen eight devoted to practice that it had to be a pretty black looking afternoon, indeed, that kept them from stepping into their boat.

The boatkeeper was a weather-wise old man, who had guarded the Ardmore girls against disaster on the lake for a decade. Being so well used to reading the signs he never let the boats out when he considered the weather threatening in any measure.

One afternoon, when there had been a call

passed for the freshmen eight to gather at the boathouse immediately after recitations, Johnnie, as the boatman was called, had been called away from his post. Only a green assistant was there to look after the boats, and he was much too bashful to "look after the girls," as Jennie, giggling, observed.

"I don't see why they don't put blinders on that young man," she said. "Whenever he has to look at one of us girls his freckles light up as though there was an electric bulb behind each individual one."

"Oh, Heavy! Behave!" murmured Helen, yet amused, too, by the bashfulness of the assistant.

"We *are* a sight, I admit," went on Jennie. "Everything in the shell, girls? Now! up with it. Come on, little Trix," she added to the coxswain. "Don't get your tiller-lines snarled, and bring your 'nose-warmer' "—by which inelegant term she referred to the megaphone which, when they were really trying for speed was strapped to the coxswain's head.

The eight oarswomen picked the light shell up, shoulder high, and marched down the platform to the float. Taking their cue from the tam-o'-shanters, the seniors had made them wear early in their college experience, the freshmen eight wore light blue bandannas wound around their heads, with the corners sticking up like rabbit-ears, blue

blouses, short skirts over bloomers, and blue stockings with white shoes. Their appearance was exceedingly natty.

"If we don't win in the races, we'll be worth looking at," Helen once said pridefully.

The assistant boatkeeper remained at a distance and said not a word to them, although there was a bank of black cloud upon the western horizon into which the sun would plunge after a time.

"We're the first out," cried one of the girls. "There isn't another boat on the lake."

"Wrong, Sally," Ruth Fielding said. "I just saw a boat disappear behind Bliss Island."

"Not one of *ours?*" cried Jennie, looking about as they lowered the shell into the water.

"No. It was a skiff. Came from the other side, I guess. Or perhaps it came up the river from the railroad bridge."

"Now," said Trix Davenport, the coxswain, "are we going to ask that boy to get out the launch and follow us?"

"Oh, goodness me! No," said Helen, with assurance. "We don't want him tagging us. Do we, girls?"

"Perhaps it might be better," Ruth said slowly.

But the chorus of the other girls cried her down. Besides, she did not believe there was any danger. Of course, a rowing shell is an uncertain

thing; but she had never yet seen an accident on the lake.

All stepped in, adjusted their oars, and the coxswain pushed off. Having adjusted the rudder-lines, Trix affixed the megaphone, and lifted her hand. The eight strained forward, and the coxswain began to beat time.

Ruth set the pace in a long, swinging stroke, and the other seven fell into time. The shell shot out from the landing just as the coach appeared around the corner of Dare Hall, on her way down from the gymnasium. She gave one glance at the sky, and then started to run.

"Those foolish girls!" she exclaimed. "Where's Johnny?"

The freshman eight was far out upon the lake when she reached the boathouse, and she quickly saw that the old boatkeeper was not in sight. She tried to signal the crew of the shell to return; but the girls in the frail craft were too interested in their practice to look back toward the shore. Indeed, in a very few minutes, they swept through the slightly rough water at the eastern end of the island and disappeared behind it. The coach, Miss Mallory, beckoned the assistant boatman and ordered out the launch. But there was something wrong with the engine, and he lost some time before getting the craft started.

Meanwhile, the cloudbank was rolling up from

the west. The sun suddenly was quenched. A breath of cold wind swept down the lake and fretted the tiny waves. They sprang up in retaliation and slapped the bow of the launch, which finally got under its sputtering way.

Then a squall of wind swooped down and Miss Mallory was almost swept off her feet. The boatman steered carefully, but the engine was not yet working in good fashion. The coach made a mistake, too, in directing the launch. Instead of starting directly up the lake, and rounding the head of the island to meet the freshman shell, she ordered the boatman to trail the boat that had disappeared.

The launch was some time in beating around the lower end of the island.

CHAPTER XXIV

TREASURE HUNTING

THE freshmen shell was well around the end of Bliss Island and behind it, before the squall broke. Pulling into the rising gale as they were and the water being always a little rough here, at first none of Ruth Fielding's associates in the craft realized that there was the least danger.

They were well off shore, for near the island the water was shallow and there were rocks. These rowing shells are made so lightly that a mere scraping of the keel over a sunken boulder would probably completely wreck the craft, and well the girls knew this.

Trix Davenport steered well out from the dangerous shallows. "Pull away, girls!" she shouted through her megaphone. "It's going to blow."

And just then the real squall swept down upon them. Ruth, although setting a good, long stroke, found of a sudden that the shell was scarcely moving ahead. The wind was so strong that they were only holding their own against it.

"Pull!" shouted the coxswain again.

Ruth bent forward, braced her feet firmly and drove the long oar-blade deep into the jumping little waves. Those waves quickly became larger and "jumpier." A white wreath formed upon their crests. The shell in a very few seconds was in the midst of white water.

Once with Uncle Jabez, and in a heavy punt, the girl of the Red Mill had been caught in the rapids of the Lumano below the mill, and had fought with skill and courage to help save the boat. This effort was soon to be as great—and she realized it.

She set a pace that drove the shell on in the teeth of the squall; but the boat shivered with every stroke. It was as though they were trying to push the narrow, frail little shell into a solid wall.

In pulling her oar Ruth scarcely ever raised her eyes to a level with the coxswain's face; but when she chanced to, she saw that Trix was pallid and her eyes were clouded with fear.

Ruth hoped none of the other girls saw that mask of dread which the situation had forced upon their little coxswain. She wanted to cry out to Trix—to warn her to hide her emotion. But she had no breath to spare for this.

Every ounce of breath and of muscle she owned, Ruth put into her stroke. She felt the rhythmic spring of the craft, and knew that her

mates were keeping well up with her. They were doing their part bravely, even though they might be frightened.

And then, suddenly and fortunately, the freshman craft found a sheltered bit of water. A high shoulder of the hilly island broke the force of the wind.

"Ashore! Put us ashore!" Ruth managed to gasp so that Trix heard her.

"We—we'll wreck the shell!" complained Trix. "It's so shallow."

"We'll not drown in shallow water," ejaculated Ruth, expelling the words between strokes.

The coxswain shot them shoreward. She caught a glimpse of another boat pulled up on the beach—the skiff they had earlier seen rounding the point of the island.

In thirty seconds they were safe. The rain began to pour down upon them in a brisk torrent. But that did not matter.

"Rather be half drowned in the rain than wholly drowned in the lake!" Jennie Stone declared, as they scrambled out into the shallow water, more than ankle deep, and lifted the treacherous shell out of the lake.

"Goodness! what a near one that was!" Helen declared.

Ruth looked at the skiff drawn up on the shore, and then up into the grove of trees.

"I wonder where the girl is who was in that boat?" she said.

"Was it a girl?" asked Helen, with interest.

"Yes. She must have found shelter somewhere from this rain. Come on! We may be able to keep reasonably dry up there in the woods."

The other girls followed Ruth, for she was naturally their leader. The rain continued to beat down upon them; but before they reached the opening in which was situated the Stone Face, Ruth spied an evergreen, the drooping branches of which offered them reasonable shelter.

"Come on into the green tent, girls!" shouted Jennie Stone, plunging into the dimly lighted circle under the tree. "Oh! Goodness! What's that?"

"A dog!"

"A cow! and I'm afraid of co-o-ows!" wailed Sally Blanchard, seizing upon Ruth as the nearest savior.

"Don't be silly, child," vouchsafed Helen, who had followed Jennie. "How would a cow come upon this island—a mile from shore?"

"Or a dog?" laughed Ruth. "What *did* you see, Jennie Stone?"

"She just tried to fool us," Helen declared.

"Didn't either," the stout girl said warmly. "Something ran out at the far side as I came in."

"An animal?" gasped Trix Davenport.

"Well," returned Jennie Stone, "it certainly wasn't a vegetable. At least, I never saw a vegetable run as fast as that thing did."

"You needn't try to scare us to death, Heavy," complained Helen. "Of course it must have been the girl Ruth said came ashore in that skiff."

"Well, I didn't think of her," admitted Jennie. "But she ran like a ferret. I'd like to know who she is."

"Remember the girl we found over here that night in the snowstorm?" whispered Helen to Ruth. "The girl who looked like that Maggie?"

"Oh, don't I!" exclaimed Ruth, shaking her head.

"What do you suppose *she* was after—and what is this one over here on the island for?" pursued Helen, languidly.

Ruth made no reply, but her cheeks flushed and her eyes grew brighter. She stooped and peered out at the decreasing rainfall. There was a path leading straight toward the Stone Face. Had this girl whom Jennie had seen gone in that direction?

The other members of the freshman crew were so inordinately busy chattering and laughing and telling jokes and stories that nobody for the moment noticed Ruth Fielding, who stole out from the covert through the fast slackening rainfall without saying a word. Lightly running over the

crest of the hill, she came in sight of the huge boulder at which she and Helen had experienced their never-to-be-forgotten adventure the winter before.

She saw nobody at the foot of the boulder, but she pressed on to the edge of the grove to make sure. And then she saw that somebody had certainly and very recently been at work near the boulder.

There was a pickaxe—perhaps the very one she had seen there in the winter—and a shovel. Some attempt had been made to dig over the gravelly soil for some yards from the foot of the boulder.

"Goodness me! what can this mean?" thought the girl of the Red Mill. "Something must be buried here! Treasure hunters! Fancy!" and she laughed a little uncertainly. "Can somebody believe that this is one of the hiding places of Captain Kidd's gold? Who ever heard the like?"

The rain ceased falling. There was a tooting of a horn down behind the island. The launch had come in sight of the shell and Miss Mallory was trying to signal the girls to return to the shore.

But Ruth did not go back. She heard the girls shout for her, but instead of complying she went straight across to the Stone Face and picked up the heavy pickaxe.

"I don't believe whoever has been digging has found anything yet," she told herself. "No. She's been here before—for, of course, it is that girl. She couldn't have dug all this over in a few minutes. No. She has been here and dug unsuccessfully. Then she has come back to-day for another attempt at—at the treasure, shall we call it? Well!"

There was already an excavation more than a foot in depth and several yards in circumference. Whatever it was the strange girl had been after she was not quite sure of its burial place.

In the winter when she had essayed to dig for the hidden thing there had been too much frost in the ground. Besides, doubtless Ruth and Helen's inquisitiveness had frightened the strange girl away. Now she was back again—somewhere now on Bliss Island. She had not accomplished her purpose as yet. Ruth smote the hard ground at her feet with all her strength. The pick sunk to its helve in the earth, now softened by the spring rain.

"Oh! I hit something!" she gasped.

In all probability she would not have continued to dig had this success not met her at the beginning. Really, her swinging of the pickaxe had been idly done. But the steel rang sharply on something. She raised the pick and used it thereafter more cautiously. There certainly was some-

thing below the surface—not very far down——

Dropping the pickaxe, Ruth gained possession of the shovel and threw aside the loose earth. Yes! there was some object hidden there—some "treasure" which she desired to see.

In a few moments, becoming impatient of the shovel, she cast it aside and stooping, with her feet planted firmly in the muddy earth, she groped in the hole with both hands.

Before she dragged the object into sight Ruth Fielding was positive by its shape and the feel of it, of the nature of the object. As she rose up at last, firmly grasping the object, a sharp voice said behind her:

"Well, now that you've interfered and found it, suppose you hand it over to me. You haven't any business with that vase, you know!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE END OF A PERFECT YEAR

HELEN CAMERON came running over the hill and down the sloppy path through the grove. When she reached the Stone Face where Ruth and the strange girl were standing, she cried:

"What *is* the matter with you, Ruthie Fielding? Come on over to the boat. Miss Mallory sent me after you. . . . Why! who's this?"

"Don't you remember this girl, Helen?" asked Ruth, seriously.

"Why! it's the girl who was camping in the snow, isn't it?" said Helen, curiously eyeing the stranger. "How-do?"

But the other was not pleased to allow the situation to develop into merely a well-bred meeting of three former acquaintances. She did not vouchsafe Helen a glance, but said, directing her words toward Ruth:

"I want that vase. It doesn't belong to you."

"Goodness, Ruthie!" put in her chum, for the first time seeing the object in Ruth's hands. "What is that thing?"

"I just dug it up here. It is the Egyptian vase taken from the Ardmore library last year I believe."

"It doesn't matter where it came from. I want it," cried the strange girl, and she stepped forward quickly as though to seize the muddy vase.

But Helen sprang forward and pushed her back.

"Hold on! I guess if Ruth's got it, you'll have to wait and prove property," said Helen. "How about it, Ruth?"

"She must tell us all about it," said Ruth, firmly. "Perhaps I may let her have it—if she tells us the truth."

"The truth!" exclaimed Helen.

"I won't tell you a thing!" cried the strange girl. "You haven't any right to that vase."

"Nor have you," Ruth told her.

"Well——"

"Nor has Margaret Rolff," went on Ruth, coolly. "I take it you are acting for her, aren't you?"

"Why," cried Helen, beginning to understand. "That is the girl who left Ardmore last year?"

"And came to the Red Mill after spending the summer at a camp on the Lumano and helped Aunt Alvirah," Ruth added, with a smile.

"Well, I never! Not Maggie?" demanded Helen.

"I think I am right," Ruth said quietly. "Am I not?" to the other girl. "Our Maggie is Margaret Rolff, and *you* must be her sister. At least, you look enough like her to be some relative."

The other made a gesture of resignation and dropped her hands. "I might as well confess it," she admitted. "You are Ruth Fielding, and Margy told me long ago you might be trusted."

"And this is my particular friend, Helen Cameron," Ruth said, "who is to be fully trusted, too."

"I suppose so," said the girl. My name is Betty. I'm Margy's younger sister. Poor Margy. She never was very strong. I mean that she was always giving in to other people—was easily confused.

"She's bright enough, you know," pursued the other girl, warmly; "but she is nervous and easily put out. What those girls did to her last year at this college was a shame!"

Another hail from behind the hill warned Ruth that she must attend Miss Mallory's command or there would be trouble.

"We cannot wait to hear it all, Miss—Betty, did you say your name was? Where are you staying?"

"I have been working in Greenburg all winter. We're poor girls and have no parents. Margy is with me now," said the girl. "And I want that

vase. I want it for Margy. She will never be satisfied until she can give it back to the dean of the college herself and explain how she came to hide it, and then forgot where she hid the vase."

"Tell me where to find you in Greenburg," said Ruth, hastily. "No! I'll not let you have the vase now. I will not show it to anybody else, however, and we'll come over to town this evening and bring it with us, and talk with Maggie."

"Oh, Miss Fielding——"

"That must satisfy you," said Ruth, firmly; and Betty Rolff had to be satisfied with this promise. She told the chums where she and Margaret were staying and then Ruth and Helen ran back to their friends, Ruth concealing the hastily wiped silver vase under the loose front of her blouse.

"Goodness!" she said to Helen, "I hope nobody will see it. Do I bulge *much?*"

There was so much excitement among the crew of the freshman eight, however, that Ruth's treasure-trove was not discovered. Under Miss Mallory's direction they launched the shell again, climbed aboard, and made a safe passage to the dock.

A notice was put up that very evening, however, to the effect that none of the racing shells were to be taken out unless the launch was manned and went with the frailer craft.

The students of Ardmore were allowed to leave the college grounds in the evening if they were properly chaperoned. And when Ruth went to Miss Cullam and explained a little of what was afoot, the mathematics instructor was only too glad to act in the capacity of chaperon.

Helen had telephoned for a car, and the three rode down to Greenburg immediately after dinner. Ruth carried the recovered vase, just as she had dug it out of the hole by the Stone Face on Bliss Island, wrapped in a paper. She had not had time either to clean it or to examine it more thoroughly.

They easily found the boarding house, the address of which Betty Rolff had given to Ruth. It was a respectable place, but was far from sumptuous. It was evident, as Ruth had been previously informed, that the Rolff girls were not very well off in this world's goods.

When the visitors climbed to the second floor bedroom where the sisters were lodged, Miss Cullam took the lead, walked straight in, seized Margaret Rolff in her arms and implanted a kiss upon the pale cheek of the girl who had for so many months been Aunt Alvirah's assistant at the Red Mill.

"You poor girl!" said the mathematics teacher. "What you must have been through! Now, I am delighted to see you again, and you must tell me

all about it—how you came to take the vase, and bury it, and all."

There was a good deal of talk on both sides before all this that Miss Cullam asked was explained. But the facts were made clear at last.

In the first place, Margaret Rolff had always been very much afraid of the dark and of being alone at night. But she wanted so much to become a member of the Kappa Alpha that she did not try to cry off when she received her instructions as a candidate for membership in that sorority.

The first part of her initiation test was easy enough. She secured the Egyptian vase from the reception room of the library without being apprehended. Then she was rowed across the lake to the island by several black-robed and hooded figures whom she did not know.

Left with a flashlight and a spade to bury the stolen vase within a short distance of the Stone Face, Margaret had tried her best to control her nerves and do as she was commanded. But she could never really remember whether she had buried the vase or not. The idea had been for her to bury it, and then another candidate would be made to search for it the next night.

Everything about the initiation went wrong, however, because Margaret lost her nerve. The members of the sorority could not find the place

where the candidate had really dug her hole and buried the vase. And Margaret had fled in a panic from the college before further inquiry could be made.

"All this time," explained the practical sister, Betty, "Margy has wanted to know if she did bury the vase or not. She felt she had stolen from the college and could be punished for it. I think those girls that set her the task should be punished."

"They have been," said Miss Cullam, grimly. "Yet, it was really a misunderstanding all around. Now, let me see that vase, Ruth Fielding."

The latter was glad to do this. The teacher opened the package and immediately turned the vase upside down and shook it. There was evidently something inside, and after some work with the handiest of all feminine tools, a hatpin, a soggy mass of paper was dislodged from the Egyptian vase.

"The missing examination papers, girls!" sighed Miss Cullam, with much satisfaction. "There, Margaret! You may have the vase and return it to Dr. Milroth to-morrow if you like. And I hope you will return to the college and be with us next year.

"I have what *I* am after and feel more contented in my mind that I have for some months. Dear me, girls! you don't at all understand what

a number of trials and perplexities are heaped upon the minds of us poor teachers."

* * * * * * *

There were many other incidents occurring at Ardmore before the end of what Helen Cameron declared was a "perfect year." But nothing created more interest than the recovery of the Egyptian vase with the missing examination papers, unless it was the boat races. Though to a few, perhaps, certain plans for the coming summer overtopped even these in importance. These were such a very great secret that the chums scarcely dared discuss them.

But those readers who may so desire will read about the happenings that developed from these plans of Ruth and her friends in the subsequent volume of the series, entitled, "Ruth Fielding in the Saddle; or, College Girls in the Land of Gold."

First of the races was that with the first eight of Beardsley; and the crew of Ardmore won. Then came the trial between Ardmore and Hampton College, and the former won that as well.

Ardmore was in high fettle at that. *The Jasper* was quite as enthusiastically complimentary now as it had been critical after the race with Gillings, for in winning the race against Hampton College, the Ardmore crew had been forced to row through very rough water.

Commencement came in June, and two days before the graduation exercises of the senior class, the local aquatic sports were held. The main incident of this carnival was the race between the class eights.

The shells were started at twenty-yard intervals, and in the order of the classes. The freshman eight, in which rowed Ruth, Helen and Jennie, had practised vigorously all these weeks and now they displayed the value of their exertions.

Within the first quarter they "bumped" the sophomore eight. This crew dropped out of the race immediately and the freshmen spun ahead, Ruth setting a wonderfully effective stroke, and little Trix Davenport swaying her body in time with the motion of the boat and shouting encouragement through her megaphone.

On and on crept the freshman eight until there was barely a hand's breadth between the nose of their shell and the stern of the junior craft. The crowd along shore cheered the younger girls vociferously, and although they did not quite "bump" the juniors before crossing the mile line——

"We came so near it there was no fun in it!" declared Jennie Stone, delightedly. "Oh, girls! some of us are going to be great rowists after a few more years at Ardmore."

"Dear me," panted Helen, making the last pun of the term. "It should be called *Hard*-more. I

never worked so hard in my life as I have this first year at college."

"But it will never hurt us," laughed Ruth, later. "We have got on famously."

"*You* have, my dear," interposed Helen. "You stand A, number one in classes. And look at that new play of yours—a big success! Money is rolling in on you——"

"Think a little of yourself," proposed Ruth. "Don't you consider your time well spent here, my dear chum?"

"Sure! It *is* the end of a perfect year," agreed Helen.

"And think of me—*little* me!" cried Jennie Stone, bursting into the chums' study at that moment, and in time to hear the last of the conversation. "Do you know what's happened, girls?"

"No! What?" demanded the curious Helen.

"I have lost another pound," said the ex-fat girl, in a sepulchral voice.

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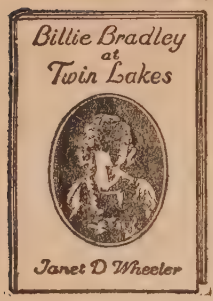

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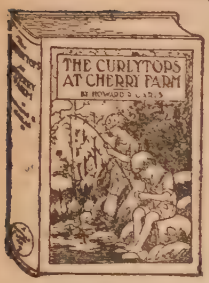

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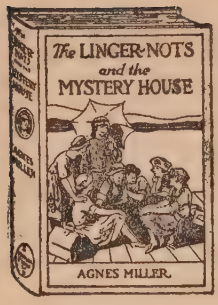

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